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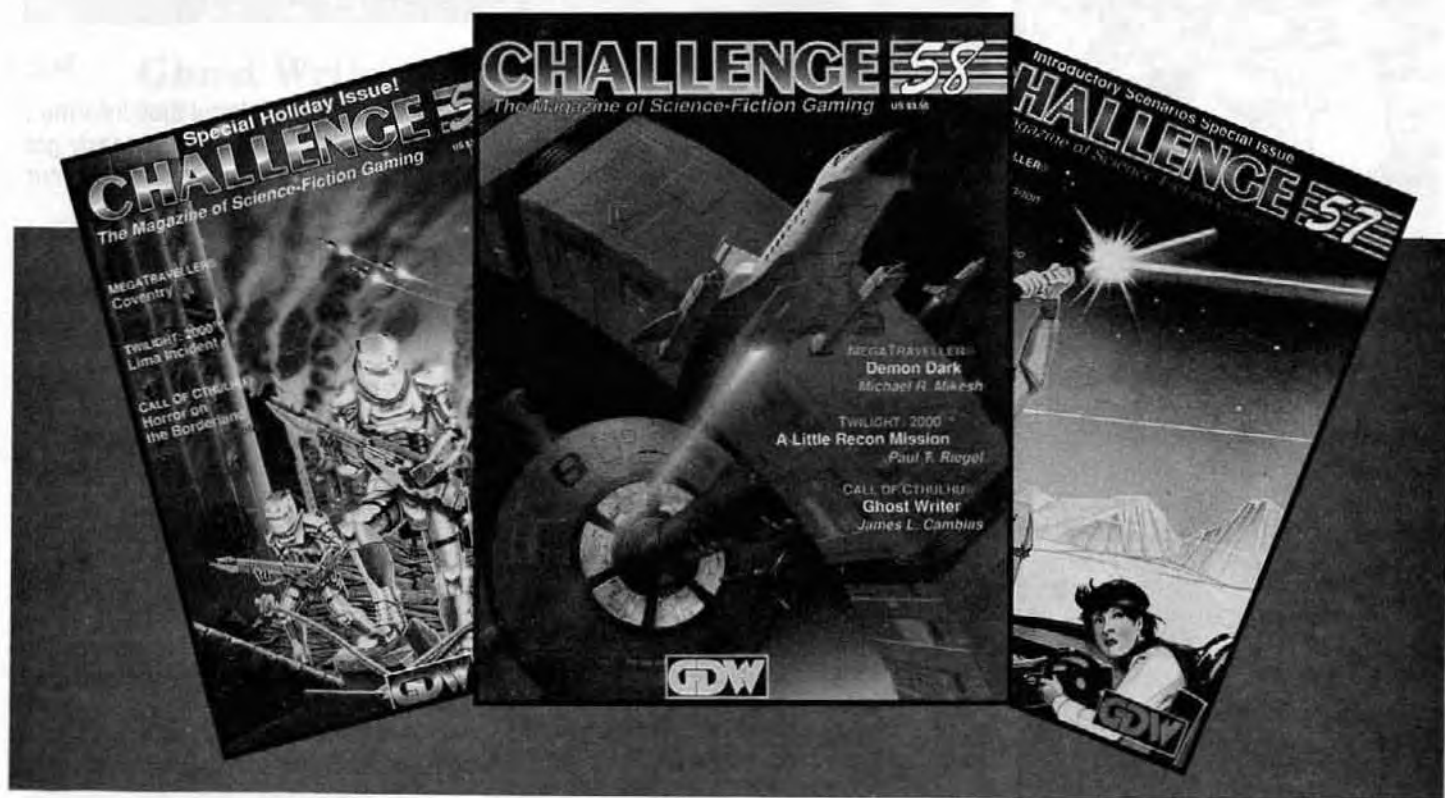
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This month's cover features a glimpse into the 2300 AD universe with "Lagrange Point" by Alan Gutierrez.

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CHALLENGE

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

Twilight: 2000

6 A Little Recon Mission

"We have another little recon mission for you boys," Colonel Blue informed us. "Great," I heard myself saying, "the last little recon mission nearly got us killed up in Lima." The colonel glared over at me as nervous laughter spread through the room. *Paul T. Riegel*

12 Silence is Golden (Merc: 2000)

Mercs are usually called in to tackle the tough jobs, filthy messes their employers don't want to handle or consider too dirty to risk themselves. Mercs are expendable and deniable. *Craig Sheeley*

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The PCs run afoul of a local merchant prince in the Vargr Extents and find out just how seriously some Vargr take their games. *Philip Athans*

Dark Conspiracy

32 The Only Good Monster is a Dead Monster

General Rockard always took the toughest jobs, the suicide missions. If he'd been a Viking, they'd have called him a berserker. Imagine my shock when he contacted me. That's like being called to dice with death. I might not win, but the game won't be boring. *Craig Sheeley*

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38 Dioscuria

A medium-sized city in the northern steppes of Mars west of the Boreosyrts League, Dioscuria stands at the intersection of three dead canals, surrounded only by good farmland. Were it not the center of German influence on Mars, Dioscuria would be little more than another way station on the caravan route to Cydonia. *James L. Cambias*

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James L. Cambias

2300 AD

58 Just How Good is Sidearm-5, Anyway?

Gamers often plague referees with questions like, "How good is expertise level 2?" or "What skill level should I take in Combat Rifle?" And when PCs encounter a new NPC, they may need to know his level of expertise.
Andy Slack

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60 Streets on Fire

It ain't the lone wolf that brings down the prey. It's the pack. And if you're goin' up for a rumble, your gonna want all the numbers you can get, 'cause you can bet the opposition ain't gonna hesitate to gang up on you. Like the wise man says, chummer, "The best strategy is to be very strong."
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From the far-future "hard" approach of *MegaTraveller* to the near-future mystical milieu of *Shadowrun*, most responsible SF is based on "facts." But it is all too easy to enter situations where the scientific realities are over our head or where we are changing the laws of physics.
Charles E. Gannon



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CHALLENGE *Opinion*

FROM THE MANAGEMENT

Personally, I think this feud boils down to the goals of the players. The roleplayers want an escape from the normal world, the puzzle solvers want intellectual challenge, and the adventurers want the thrill of victory. All of these are valid goals, but when these groups mix, frustration is usually the result.

arguments and anger stop the game, and no one has any fun. After a particularly stirring speech, the roleplayer is frustrated when the adventurer GM reduces it all to an oratory roll. The adventurer is driven to distraction when the roleplaying referee gives so little reward for a difficult job and demands that he roleplay every last word and action. The puzzle solver finds the intellectual labyrinths of both approaches to be too simple and quickly gets bored.

By my thinking, there are two possible solutions to this problem. Either stick with a group that likes your approach or take everything with a little tolerance and moderation. The first solution is by far the inferior—it eliminates a whole world of other gamers who want to play. On the other hand,

All this boils down to one concept: moderation. By taking everything with a grain of salt and not accepting any one method as the do all, be all and end all of gaming, you open yourself to a whole universe of diversity. In a stale and boring world, that diversity is too rare to ignore.

Challenge Opinion provides gamers an opportunity to air their views. The opinions presented do not necessarily reflect those of the magazine. **Challenge** reserves the right to edit letters. Write to **Challenge** Letters, Managing Editor, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.



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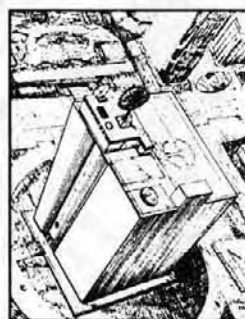


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A Little Recon Mission

By Paul T. Riegel

"We have another little recon mission for you boys," Colonel Blue informed us.

"Great," I heard myself saying, "the last little recon mission nearly got us killed up in Lima." The colonel glared over at me as nervous laughter spread through the room.

Colonel Blue continued "Some unusual activity has been reported down at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. They've been mounting more and wider-ranging patrols than ever before. With part of the 194th Armored Brigade just across the border at

Richmond, this could be an ominous sign. They may be attempting to recruit the smaller independent towns to join them under some Milgov plan to split and take over the state government. We need you to undertake a little reconnaissance and find out what they're up to."

Rumors have reached Columbus that units from the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (known as the WP Enclave) have been popping up all over Southwest Ohio. They are making friendly gestures to all groups they meet and also seem to be looking for something. What they are looking for has yet to become clear. The PCs

A.N.
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have been hired by Civgov to work as a semiautonomous special operations group (SOG) to infiltrate the enclave and investigate the situation.

For additional information on adventuring in Ohio, refer to "Lima Incident" by Paul T. Riegel in **Challenge 56**.

Weapons: One vehicle may have an M60 LMG mount, and an M203 grenade launcher with six rounds of ammunition is available. PCs will be provided a single pistol and rifle of their choice. They may also select a sniper rifle and either two Armbrusts or two M72 LAWs.

PCs will be allowed 300 rounds of ammunition per weapon, 100 rounds only for rare weapons. They should be given the option of four grenades, plus a thermite grenade for the code books and the speech security equipment. Also, they should receive a Claymore and two trip flares per vehicle.

Vehicles: The adventurers may select any unarmored, unarmed cargo vehicle, one per two persons maximum. Also, they may have one trailer per vehicle, of which one may be a tank trailer, filled halfway with methyl alcohol.

Equipment: Each person is issued three sets of battle dress, a set of combat webbing, Alice pack, nylon ballistic helmet, Kevlar body armor, knife/bayonet, sleeping bag, shelter half, personal medical kit, gas mask and chemical defense unit. PCs are also issued a 5/25-kilometer vehicle radio, RC-292 antenna, five-kilowatt generator and up to a medium still. They receive one pair of binoculars for every second vehicle and may take a 25x image intensifier. They have a doctors' kit, half-filled drug kit and Geiger counter. Additional equipment should be provided as the referee sees fit.

INHABITANTS

Much of the state is inhabited by small bands of farmers, hunters and refugees from all over. Also present are a wide variety of military, militia and marauder groups.

For additional information on personnel in Ohio, refer to "Lima Incident" by Paul T. Riegel in **Challenge 56**.

Military: Ohio is divided into a series of fortified enclaves which attempt to control the surrounding territory via patrols and friendly contact with inhab-

itants. Enclaves are directed by various Ohio National Guard and Ohio Military Reserve units still loyal to the governor. (The Ohio Military Reserve was authorized in the late 1980s as a backup force in case the Ohio National Guard was called up. This unpaid, volunteer force consisted of retirees, those unfit for service in the active branches and those who just wanted to play soldier.)

Many military units in the region are equipped exclusively with the M16A1, M16EZ or M231, and have an M203 grenade launcher every 13th man, M60 light machinegun every 30th man, and M72 LAW every 15th man. MPs have a no M203s but have an M79 every 10th man and an M60 every 15th man.

Militia: Full-time militia usually carry either an M16EZ or an M231, with an M203 every 25th man and an M60 every 50th man. Part-time militia are usually equipped with M16EZs and M231s; the remainder are split between civilian sporting rifles, shotguns and pistols. Every 100th man has an M79 grenade launcher, and each camp is supplied with two M60s.

Marauders: Several active marauder groups, both former national guard and civilian, also operate in Ohio. The largest of these numbers nearly 500 and is located in northern Ohio, southern Michigan and northern Indiana. Most of the marauder groups, however, are much smaller in both size and area of operation.

POINTS OF INTEREST

For additional geographical data, refer to "Lima Incident" by Paul T. Riegel in **Challenge 56**.

Dayton, Kettering, Xenia Group: This group includes North Dayton, East Dayton, Kettering and Xenia. The communities are controlled by the 1st Military Police Group, OMR (HHD 3rd and 4th battalions). Overcrowding and supply shortages are becoming a major problem in these areas due to the refugee camps there. Some inhabitants have even expressed a desire to break with the state government and join with Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and Milgov. They towns have established a trading relationship with both Middletown and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. They have about 55 trained soldiers, 100 full-time militia and 200 part-time militia.

London, Springfield, Urbana Group: These refugee camps are among the most productive of any in the state. They are major suppliers of food to WP AFB. The camps are overcrowded, but not excessively so—at least not at the present. These communities have established their own militia using former soldiers and police officers as leaders. They have about 30 trained soldiers, 100 full-time militia and 150 part-time militia.

Middletown: Middletown was overrun with refugees from both Cincinnati and Dayton during the bomb scares. The 1416th Transportation Company, OHARNG, which was stationed there at the time, stepped in and took effective control over the situation. Without state aid, the group established housing, farms and fortifications for the population. In exchange, inhabitants gave the company their loyalty. They have subsequently quit taking orders from the state government. The 1416th Transportation Company has about 40 trained soldiers, six M151A1 jeeps and three M60 LMGs.

New Richmond: This community was the site of the federal nuclear weapons plant, which has subsequently been shut down. The 2nd Battalion, 1st Military Police Group, OMR has established extensive defenses around the site to prevent marauders from gaining equipment. There are 55 people with eight M60 LMGs.

Oxford: After a break with state control and several unsuccessful raids, the 54th Rear Operations Center has settled in Oxford. This former college town has been used by the 54th RAOC to raid in Ohio and Indiana. There are about 45 trained soldiers and 60 recruits, with six M151A1 jeeps and four M60 LMGs.

Richmond, IN: This town hosts A Company, 194th Armored Brigade. A Company was dispatched from Cairo, IL to support the military government in Indiana. There are 60 men, with five M1s and six HMMWVs. They have had several small border clashes with the 1st MP Group, OMR.

Troy, Piqua, Sidney, Wapakoneta Consortium: Ignored for the most part by the state government, these communities banded together for protection from marauders. They actively support the state government with food, and in return the get advisors and ma-

terial. Consequently, they have about 45 trained soldiers and 220 part-time militia. They still cannot mount patrols and are easy prey for marauders.

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB

The Wright-Patterson AFB (known as the WP Enclave) has grown, necessarily, to incorporate Fairborn Ohio, which sits between the Wright and Patterson airfields.

By the year 2000, Wright Field has ceased to function as a viable airfield. Much of the electronics and equipment has been transferred to Patterson Field. The runways are overgrown and cracked due to lack of maintenance, and the grassed areas have been converted to small farms, which produce vegetables and fruit used by the base. Also, a small herd of cattle, some chickens and a few hogs call Wright Field their home. Many of the hangars, originally designed to house the mighty B-52 *Stratofortresses*, have been converted to housing. Hanger 18, however is still classified, closed and closely guarded. The base hospital, which sits near Wright Field's main gate, is still open.

Patterson Field has many small farms occupying its infield, producing lettuce, potatoes, cabbage and carrots.

Defenses

The WP Enclave's defenses are organized in three rings.

Outer Ring: The outer ring, encompassing the entirety of the base and the city of Fairborn, consists of guard posts along the roads, plus outpost bunkers which are mostly monitoring stations for electronic surveillance systems.

Outpost Bunkers: Outpost bunkers are log-covered trenches with facilities for four men. Guards are divided into two shifts. At all times, one guard watches the PRD-3000/SV monitor, one scans the area with binoculars or IR goggles, and two off-duty guards rest or eat. Each bunker is equipped with a Geiger counter, four gas masks, 0.5-kilometer hand radios, M16A2 rifles, an M203 grenade launcher with four rounds (two HE, one Illum and one red flare), and seven grenades (four fragmentation, one thermite, one green smoke and one blue smoke).

Roadblock Bunkers: All roads entering the perimeter have guard posts,

with field-expedient concertina wire stretched across the road and sandbagged bunkers on either side of the road. Each bunker has a bipod-mounted M16A2, an M72 LAW and an M203 grenade launcher with four rounds (two HE, one Illum and one red flare). Each bunker is equipped with a five-kilometer backpack radio.

Two guards—with MP-5 or M231 submachine guns and a Geiger counter—man the concertina wire obstacle and make close visual contact with all incoming vehicles. The guard post, usually open to the rear, is equipped with gas masks and chemical suits.

Second Ring: The second ring of the WP Enclave's defenses circles the air force base. All areas of the perimeter are covered by PRD-3000/SVs, and a nine-foot-high chainlink fence topped with concertina wire surrounds the perimeter. More remote areas are covered with minefields and hidden trip flares.

Perimeter Bunkers: Perimeter bunkers are located every 1500-2500 meters, equipped as the outpost bunkers, with the addition of a starlight scope or thermal imaging scope and a battery-powered, white-light spotlight.

Roadblock Bunkers: The base's two entrances are covered by single roadblock bunkers (as described above). Each bunker is equipped as an outpost bunker, but with an M60 light machinegun in place of the bipod-mounted M16A2, two additional fragmentation and two CS (tear gas) hand grenades, a night vision scope for the M60 and a starlight scope for the bunker.

Supporting Bunker: Located 1000 meters behind the main entrance is a supporting bunker which houses an M47 Dragon medium antitank guided missile launcher with four missiles. A sniper is equipped with an M40 sniper rifle with a telescopic night vision scope.

Inner Ring: The WP Enclave's inner defense ring is a rapid reaction force. The inner defence is centered around two ground surveillance radar systems, one covering each airfield. Four-man (or two-man/two-dog) teams patrol inside the perimeter. An emergency response team consists of two armored cars with Mark 19 autogrenade launcher Peacekeepers, 15 air force security police and 35 recruits.

TWILIGHT: 2000

The airfield control/operations building and the base headquarters are sandbagged and heavily guarded, backed by two M60 LMGs and one M2HB 50-caliber heavy machinegun in sandbagged emplacements. The base headquarters houses the armory, which has a Stinger shoulder-fired SAM among its more interesting items.

INFILTRATING WP

The PCs' mission requires them to infiltrate the enclave and discover what the group is up to. The methods they use are left entirely up to the group.

A likely place to search for information is the communications shack. The shack can be identified by the numerous radio antennas standing behind it. The first floor windows are sandbagged, and the main entrance has two armed guards. The second floor is used for storage and is unprotected. In addition, there is an unguarded rear basement door where antenna cables enter the building. Parked to one side of the main entrance is an HMMWV, an M880 truck and an M35A1. The HMMWV is open-topped and mounts an M60 LMG on a center pintal mount. The M35A1 has a one-ton cargo trailer with a section of a pontoon bridge and outboard motor protruding from the rear.

If they search the communications shack, the PCs will come across a classified, handwritten message form addressed to the WP AFB commander from SFC Phillip Rogers, commander of 1 DET, 477th NERT. The message is as follows: "Have proceeded to Ironton. Appears NORAD information correct. Object appears intact. Require boat and underwater gear to locate. Active marauders in the area."

Despite the worries of the Ohio Civgov, the WP Enclave is not recruiting new forces for Milgov. It is making radiation surveys and attempting to make friendly contact with those they encounter. The people at WP are acting on information transmitted to them by NORAD during the nuclear exchange

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about a possible dud nuclear warhead that came down near Cattlesburg, KY. The message above indicates that there may indeed be an intact nuclear warhead and that recovery operations should be commenced. To this end, the 477th Nuclear Emergency Response Team—with an M35A1, M880 and armed HMMWV—are being dispatched to the area for recovery operations.

If the player characters infiltrated WP AFB under friendly disguise, they may be asked to accompany a radiation survey mission to Ironton to determine radiation levels. They may even be let in on the operation should it be successful and asked to aid in the warhead's return to the nuclear warhead bunkers at WP.

If the PCs broke into WP and were captured, they will be detained and considered unfriendly. In that case, they will have to formulate and implement a feasible escape plan.

Either way, the PCs will want to send word back to Civgov concerning the information they've gained. The group will then be instructed to ensure that the warhead, if recovered, is returned to WP or to Columbus. The Ohio government would not want the warhead to fall

into any hostile or nongovernmental hands.

IRONTON

The 477th survey party's camp has been raided by marauders, and only one member of the survey team survives. The marauder band is still active in the area, and encounters are likely.

The operation will take two to three days to locate the warhead, two days for recovery and another day for packing up for return to WP. The recovery team will find a 0.5 MT nuclear device buried in the bottom of the Ohio River, the remnants of a Soviet MIRV.

The return to WPAFB will be harrowing: Civgov of Ohio does not keep secrets well, and the New America Cell in Ohio has a few friends in the Ohio government. So it will not take long for Bruce Alexander and his new group to find out about it, and they will certainly plan an ambush.

Alexander is an Elite NPC armed with an Uzi. His followers are three Novice and five Experienced NPCs armed with sporting rifles and two fragmentation hand grenades. For more on Alexander and his thugs, refer to "Lima Incident" by Paul T. Riegel in **Challenge 56**. Ω



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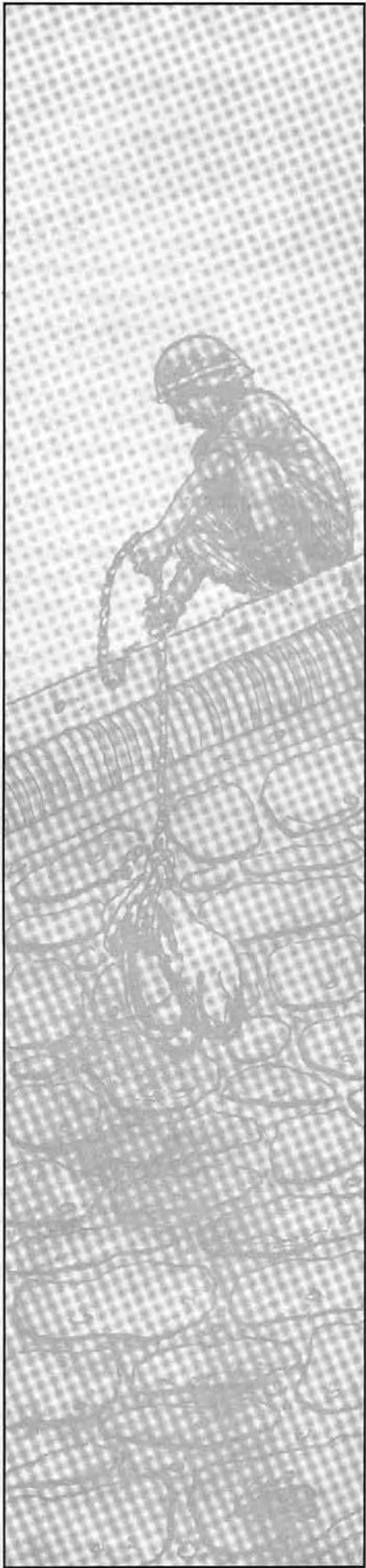
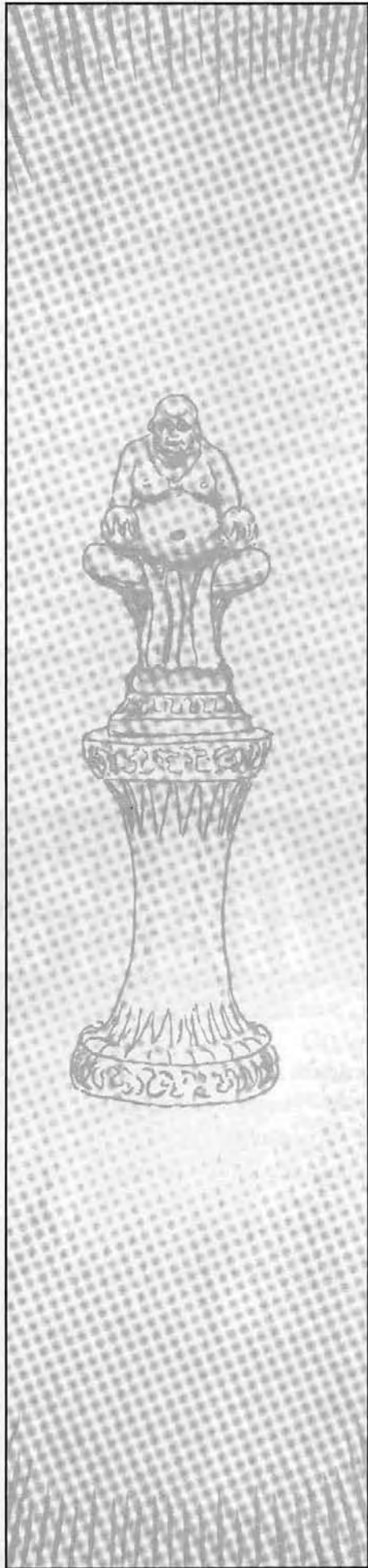
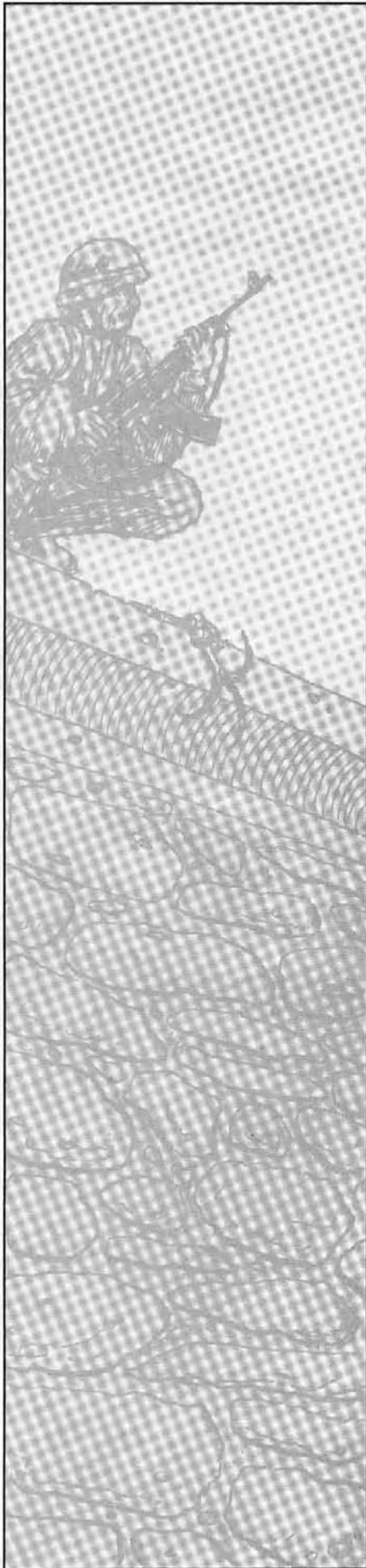
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(Miniature players list time periods)

GC3



Silence is Golden

By Craig Sheeley

There is an underside to the mercenary lifestyle. Many jobs demand a lack of ethics or honor rather than face-to-face, honest combat. Mercs are usually called in to tackle the tough jobs, filthy messes their employers don't want to handle or consider too dirty to risk themselves. Mercs are expendable and deniable.

This scenario involves one of those dirty jobs. An anonymous wealthy client (dealing through intermediaries) is willing to pay an immense amount of money to possess a minor idol. The offer is highly tempting: \$10,000 per person on the mission (limit 10), with \$1000 in advance for expenses and the rest on delivery of the idol.

The mercs are to gain entrance to the temple where the idol is located, secure the artifact and then extract themselves on their own. Two boats will be waiting at the waterfront a mere 1000 meters away. One boat, a speedboat (equal to a fast patrol boat but unarmed and capable of hauling 12 men), waits to whisk the mercs downstream to a waiting seaplane.

The other boat, an innocent-looking sampan, waits to receive the idol. The idol will be spirited away by a minisub lurking beneath the sampan, off to join the patron's collection.

IDOL

The idol is a small golden Buddha, resting in the Wat Suthat temple of Bangkok. It weighs approximately 100 kilograms and is small enough to fit into a backpack. It is in the Bot, the chapel of the Wat, on the shrine altar, according to all reports. The Wat is open to tourists (although not to cameras), so the idol's location can be checked daily.

The Wat is in one of the rougher districts of Bangkok, a district ruled by one of the Chinese gangs, a triad. It is suspected that the triad uses the Wat as a storage house for drugs and other valuables (and contributes richly to the temple's welfare), and so has added some defenses to the Wat.

Also, the temple is guarded by soldiers of the Triad. No weapons are permitted inside the Wat. Firearms and heavy weapons are kept in a guardhouse (a fortified building) next door to the temple—largely AK-47s, some PK machineguns, several RPG-16s and SA-7 Grail SAMs (laughingly referred to as the "Holy Grails"). The monks on guard there have responded quickly to past threats, with lethal force. The guardhouse is manned at all times by at least 30 armed men, and commands fire zones surrounding the temple and its grounds.

RECONNAISSANCE

Once they arrive in Bangkok, the mercs can easily go to the Wat to see the idol for themselves. They are not permitted to bring in weapons, cameras, or radios. They must bring an offering of fruit and/or flowers to be allowed into the Bot to see the shrine.

The Wat's layout is simple, consisting of the Bot, the monks' quarters, the abbot's house and the transients' house. The walls are three meters high and one meter thick, tipped with sculpted brass spikes one meter apart (mostly decorative). The gates are made of thick wrought-iron and are secured every night. There does not seem to be much security past the gates.

Inside the Bot, the idol sits among other Buddhas, a sight to make the greedy salivate. The other idols are festooned with ropes of pearls, implanted with valuable-looking jewels, and covered in gold leaf. The dais of the shrine cannot be approached directly—a three-meter-deep, four-meter-wide ditch surrounds the dais. A simple iron fence, waist-high, lines the outer edge of this ditch. The pious use long bamboo poles to place their offerings upon the altar.

The Wat is inhabited by about 300 monks and a number of Triad soldiers in civilian dress. The monks are silent and attentive, clad in their simple robes and sandals. Worshipers are equally peaceful and well-mannered.

GUARD ACTIONS

The temple compound is patrolled at all times by six pairs of guards. These

guards wear kevlar vests under their clothing. They carry quarterstaves and nunchaku (which are technically not weapons, the quarterstave being a form of walking stick and the nunchucks a type of threshing implement). The guards are Veteran NPCs (Initiative 4, stats 6, skill 5, unarmed combat damage 3). Any time suspicious activity is detected, the guards will move to investigate.

If a major battle starts in the temple grounds, the searchlights from the guardhouse will be trained on the area. The armed guards will only start shooting if the intruders are armed with firearms and are slaughtering the monks in the compound.

GETTING IN

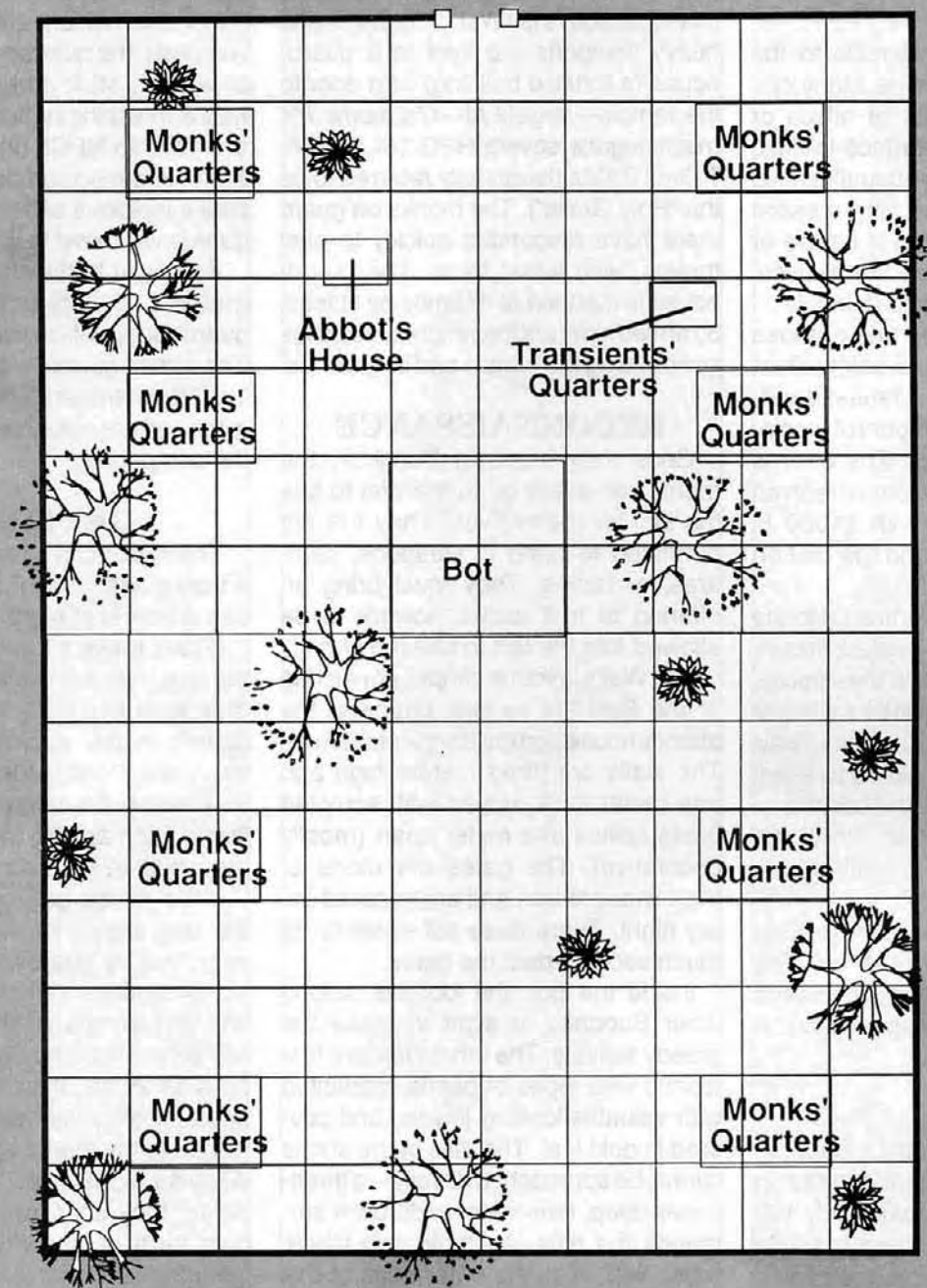
The mercs can go in during the day in a frontal assault or in disguise, or they can sneak in at night.

If they make a frontal assault during the day, they are likely to be spotted as they rush the walls or the gate. The guards in the guardhouse will make every effort to stop the attackers before they reach the temple grounds, fearlessly firing among their own people if they must to kill the interlopers.

If the mercs go in disguised during the day, they'll be well and securely searched by guards with a hand-held metal detector (among other things), and any weapons and other devices will be confiscated. If the mercs try to pass as locals, the real monks will repeatedly offer their assistance and will not leave the mercs alone. If the mercs disguise themselves as monks or students, they soon run into the monks' own form of security system, which includes questions drawn from the teachings of Buddha. Responding correctly to one of these sayings is Difficult: Education (unless the character in question was trained as a Buddhist monk, in which case it's an Average: Education task). A missed question will tip the monks to the mercs' false identities, and the guards will be summoned.

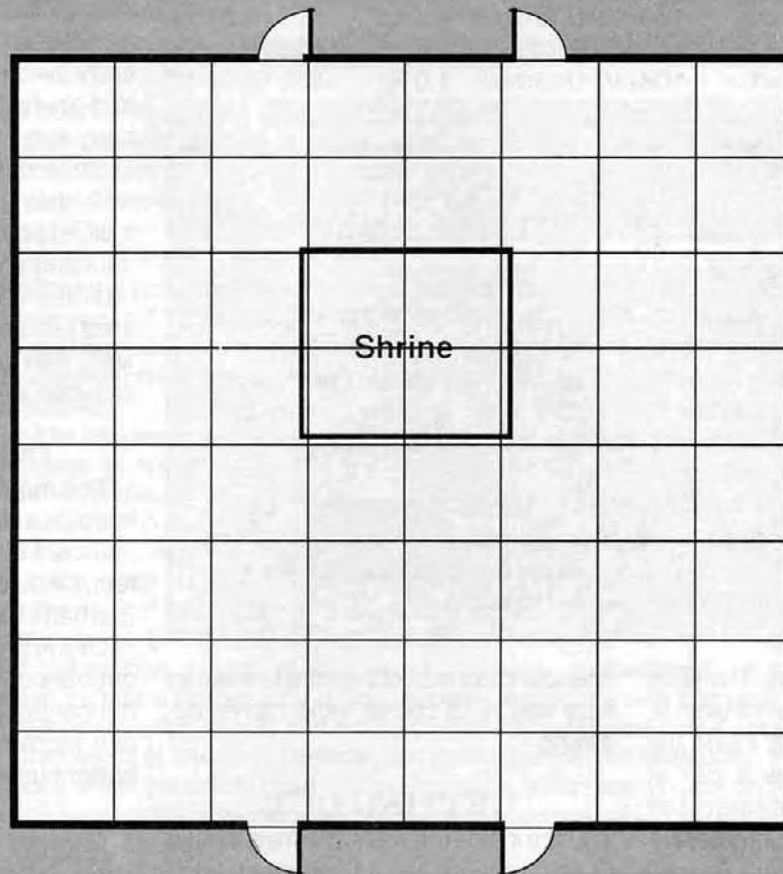
If the mercs try to sneak in at night, a simple scan with IR and UV goggles will reveal no IR or UV security setups—there is no electronic sign of ground radar, and

Thai Wat

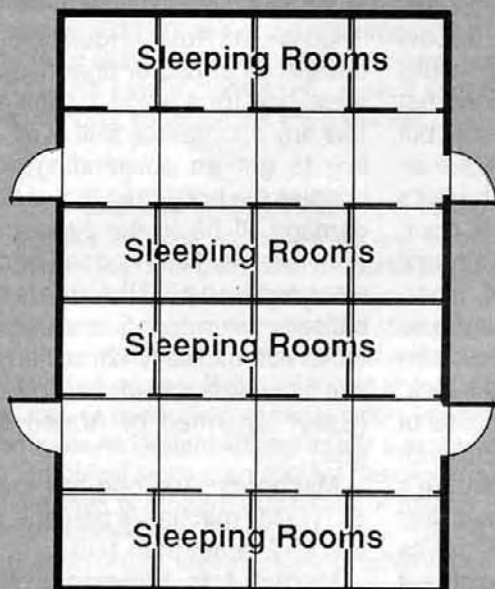


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Meters

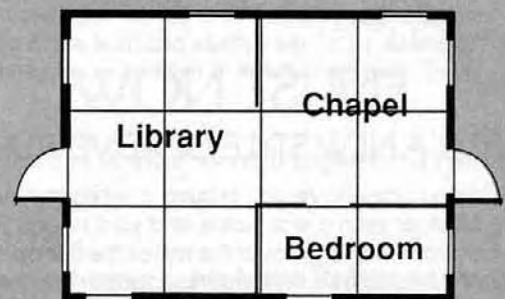
Thai Wat



BOT
(Chapel)



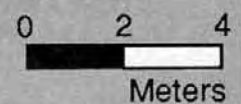
MONK'S QUARTERS



ABBOT'S HOUSE



TRANSIENTS'
QUARTERS



Melee Weapons

Weapon	Range	Hit Mod.	Damage	Weight	Cost
Nunchucks	S	-1	1D6+Unarmed	1.0 kg	\$100 (S/C)
Quarterstaff	L	0	1D6+Unarmed	2.0 kg	\$10 (V/V)
Sai	S	+1	1D6+1/2 Unarmed	0.5 kg	\$75 (R/S)
Sword	L	0	1D6+STR	1.0 kg	\$350 (S/S)
Tonfa	S	+1	1D6+1/2 Unarmed	1.0 kg	\$50 (S/S)

Cobras

Meat	Move	#Appearing	Hits	Attack	Hit#	Damage	CON
1D6x1kg	2/6/12	1-2	10	30%	5	1D6p3	12

When a person is bit by a cobra, see if the damage of the attack (the number or die roll preceding the "p" in the damage code) penetrates the armor value of the area. If it penetrates, then the poison goes to work, doing a number of dice damage to the chest area (only, ignoring armor) each phase after the first for 12 phases. Antivenom stops any further poison damage the round after administered.

For instance, a man bit by a cobra in phase 1 suffers 3D6 damage in phase 2 and 3D6 damage per phase to his chest until critically wounded. If the poison victim receives antivenom, the poison damage stops in the next phase, after the antivenom has been administered.

there appear to be no sensors. The walls and the temple's environs are not even lit, except by dim lanterns hung inside the temple. The guardhouse has a pair of searchlights on the roof, but they are not on and merely stand ready. The front gates are

closed and locked, but the walls look like an easy way in. Of course, looks can be deceiving.

GETTING OUT

Once inside the walls, the mercs have

to move at least 32 meters from the wall to the Bot, without being seen, heard or discovered. Ten monks are inside the Bot during the day, but none are there after dark. The Bot's doors are open during the day and closed at night. Opening them silently is an Average: Stealth task.

The purpose of the pit surrounding the shrine's dais becomes clear once the mercs see it at night—it is full of three-meter-long cobras (see statistics and poison rules below).

Somehow, the mercs have to get

across to the dais and lever a 100-kilogram idol across the four-meter gap, without getting snake-bit or discovered. Carrying the idol will take at least three characters (or two incredibly big and strong characters) if they want to make any speed. Remember, characters can carry twice their Load at half-speed, and mercs can assist each other to carry large weights.

Once the mercs get the idol to the wall, they have to get it over (quite a trick, especially if you have to do it in the dark and absolutely silently). Theatrical referees can have the mercs discovered just as they lever the idol over the wall, with a merry chase through the crowded streets of Bangkok.

DOUBLE-CROSS

The mercs might decide that the idol is worth a lot more than a mere \$10,000 apiece. Melted down for the gold content, it would easily be worth \$1,500,000 (perhaps more to the correct collector).

Or the patron might have decided to double-cross the mercs, planting a radio-controlled bomb in the sampan (he can recover the statue from the river bottom using a minibus).

VARIANT

MELEE COMBAT RULES

Following are optional rules to increase the perceived realism of melee combat.

Quick Kill Rule: An outstanding success in an armed or unarmed combat melee roll (or a roll of 1 if the attacker has any appropriate skill at all, but too low to get an outstanding success) cripples the body area that is hit by the damage. If hit in the head, torso or abdomen, an NPC is dead or critically wounded—on a PC the area is listed as critically wounded. Since surprise attacks automatically hit, roll anyway to see if the hit is an outstanding success (Easy: Unarmed or Armed Combat task).

Machetes: Add one-half the user's STR to the machete's damage, making it 1D6+2 rather than 1D6.

Martial Arts Weapons: Weapons such as quarter-staves, nunchucks, sais, tonfas and the like depend on skill to do damage rather than raw power. Refer to the Melee Weapons Table in the sidebar. Add Unarmed Combat damage to their damage roll instead of STR, as noted. Ω

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Articles may be no more than 4000 words in length unless previously approved by the managing editor. Always include clear, precise sketches of maps, diagrams or pieces of equipment for artist reference. If you send photocopies for artist reference, always indicate the original source or publication. If your article includes tables, send a printout of each table the way it should appear to help our typesetters set it up correctly.

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Articles generally use three levels of headings (*refer to past issues for specific examples*). The first level is the title of the article. Next, any divisions within the article need *section headings*, which are all caps on their own line (like Subject Matter, below). Any further divisions within a section need *subsection headings*, which are upper and lower case, followed by a colon and text (like Payment, above).

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SUBJECT MATTER

Articles deal with science-fiction roleplaying in all its myriad forms (we adopt a rather liberal definition of "science fiction"). We will look at articles on any science-fiction roleplaying game by any publisher, including *Twilight: 2000*, *MegaTraveller*, *Dark Conspiracy*, *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs*, *Space: 1889*, *2300 AD*, *Shadowrun*, *Torg*, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Battletech*, *Warhammer*, *Renegade Legion*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *GURPS*, *Paranoia*, *Rifts*, *Cyberpunk*, and others.

Adventure scenarios are preferred. *Sourcebook-type* articles should be combined with adventure ideas using the new information whenever possible. *Game variants* should be playtested in advance by you and be applicable to a broad range of gaming situations. *Referee's notes* should give hints to the referee on how to increase interest in the game, make his life easier, or spark his own imagination. In general, articles should be consistent with previously published information.

Twilight: All *Twilight* articles must be usable with *Twilight: 2000 2nd edition*. Ideas include an adventure situation with a geographical setting, equipment descriptions, generic personalities or locations for use in a variety of situations, and examinations of modern military life or military equipment.

MegaTraveller: All *Traveller* articles must be usable in the *MegaTraveller* universe. Include tasks and game statistics where appropriate. Ideas include an adventure with relevant background data, bestiary, or equipment description. Articles may follow either the "adventure nugget" or traditional *Challenge* format.

Space: 1889 and 2300 AD: Short adventures (1000-2000 words), plus a page or so of maps. See *Twilight Encounters* for samples of the preferred format.

Good luck. If you have any questions, send them along with an SASE to:

Michelle Sturgeon, managing editor, **Challenge** magazine, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA
January 1992

DEMON DARK

By Michael R. Mikes

A Gazelle-class close escort, *Gina Bounder* (CE-16439), was listed as missing in 911. In that same year, the Imperial Navy whisked scholars specializing in the Ancients to a high-security research center in the Lanth system (Spinward Marches 2729). They waited there for a few weeks, then were returned to their home worlds without explanation. Independent investigators later learned that the center was tied to a secret naval project rumored to involve an Ancients site in the Victoria system (1817).

An important discovery during the first quarter of 911 set off a burst of unusual naval activity, including the summons of extra equipment and ships to Victoria, the *Gina Bounder* among them. Indications suggest that the *Gina Bounder* was assigned to transport something particularly important to Lanth, but it vanished in route.

From *Abyss Rift* by Enli Iddukagan

This adventure has an open structure, allowing the referee to tailor the details to the characters' actions. The adventure may take place anywhere among the central four subsectors of the Spinward Marches. If the player characters have a ship, the patron charts it. Otherwise, they are hired as crew. The specific mission is left up to the referee, but several suggestions follow:

- A faint ship distress signal was detected beyond the fringe of the star system. Because the detecting ship was either a corsair or smuggler, the information was never formally reported to the authorities. The patron is a naval intelligence officer who has learned of the contact and is confident of its validity even if his superiors are not. Using his own resources, he wants to rendezvous with the ship and render aid.

- As above, but the patron is a rogue. He has a legitimate business salvaging space junk but is not above breaking the law for a profit. He hopes to salvage whatever ship might lie out there.

- The distress signal was clear enough to identify the ship as the *Gina Bounder*. The patron is a journalist pursuing mysterious ship disappearances in and around the Abyss Rift. (For more on the Abyss Rift, see "Lost Treasure Ships" in **Challenge 44**.)

- As above, but the patron is trying to resolve the fate of specific crewmembers. Perhaps the patron is a family member of the captain trying to clear his name of blame. Or possibly a few of those aboard were members of the Travellers' Aid Society, and that organization is sponsoring the investigation.

- As above, but the patron is actually trying to obtain the Ancients artifacts the ship carried. He will probably not be entirely open with the adventurers about what he knows.

REFeree

The distress signal from the *Gina Bounder* is intermittent, but the PCs have enough information to anticipate the approximate location and time of the next broadcast.

Strange Sensations: As the PCs explore the *Gina Bounder*, they sense that they are being watched. In fact, a malicious and powerful psionic being from the time of the Ancients has awakened from its unnatural slumber and is using its clairvoyant abilities. Little is known about the period of the Ancients. Their dominion over nearly 1000 parsecs of space ended 300,000 years ago after 2000 years of wars and destruction. Scholars refer to that time as the Final War.

The creature, called a demon by the ill-fated crew of the *Gina Bounder*, can also psionically teleport. Thus, the characters may be confused by things which are apparently disturbed without anyone having been present. This can occur on either the *Gina Bounder* or the player characters' ship.

Disappearances: Objects are not the only things affected by teleportation. As the characters explore the ship, a lone

NPC will mysteriously disappear. When called, he will not respond; when looked for, he will not be found.

NPCs who seem overly bold or who scoff at speculation of a "monster" might be the next to go. Or the referee may choose to complicate the adventure by whisking away NPCs with a particular ship skill (for instance, if all the pilots were eliminated or all the engineers, the group will have a bit of trouble getting away).

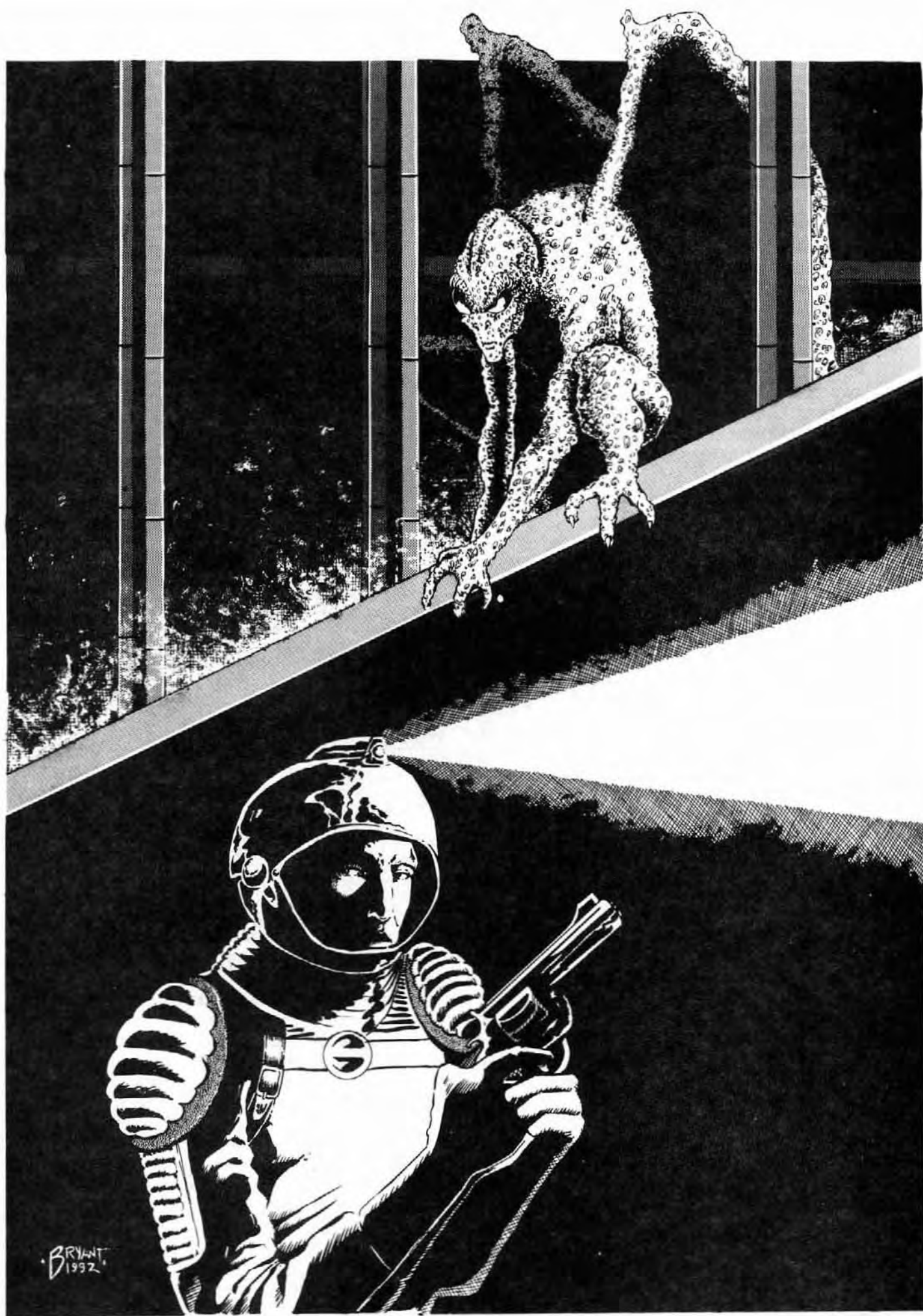
Encounters: Eventually, the group will encounter the creature face to face. Not all encounters need be fatal, especially with player characters. The demon might simply stalk its prey. As a rule of thumb, if the adventurers flee the immediate scene, let them withdraw. Show little mercy for characters who remain brash and daring despite surrounding evidence, and even less to those who take foolish actions. Courageous action, such as turning back to aid someone else, need not be penalized.

GINA BOUNDER

When the PCs rendezvous with the *Gina Bounder*, they will find the ship hanging in space, apparently undamaged, except that the port side landing floodlight has been removed. The ship is completely dark except for one small red light beside the port hatch.

The *Gina Bounder* is in a state of minimal power consumption. The few systems that remain active operate from batteries, which are recharged every few months by the power plant. The distress signal is broadcast only during these times.

The interior of the ship is dark—the lights and gravity have been turned off by the computer to conserve power. Most systems are also turned off or operating at minimal power, including the computer. The ship still has an atmosphere, but the air is foul and cold. That will clear once the characters have restarted a power plant and brought the life-support systems to normal capacity.



The ship is in disarray, with evidence of fighting and occasional brown bloodstains. More pronounced are the open maintenance panels, barricades, and scattered tools, cables and components.

The PCs will learn that mutiny broke out soon after the *Gina Bounder* left Victoria. All the officers were killed except the medical officer, Lieutenant Glenna Martin, who barricaded herself in the upper midsection of the ship. The remaining crewmembers suffered the ill effects of mistrust and a lack of confidence, and thus were poorly coordinated in their activities. These effects worsened as their situation grew increasingly desperate, and panic soon overtook them.

The universal craft profile for the close escort and gig may be found on page 84 of the *Imperial Encyclopedia*. Deck plans for the *Gazelle* are published by Seeker.

Comments regarding some specific areas within the *Gina Bounder* follow.

2. Avionics Access Corridor. The flight data recorder can be found here. The *Gina Bounder* left Victoria for Lanth in 911. Tampering with the navigational system to send it to Ylaven (1916) resulted in a misjump. Since then, the ship has been moving in toward the local star system via normal space using minimal power.

3. Crew Stateroom. Quarters for Spacehand Apprentice Agid Ginar (driver lackey) and Able Spacehand Apprentice Kagu Duren (gunner). Letters written by Ginar to his brother, Allen, speak passionately of his hatred for Lieutenant Bruce Aisley, the engineer. Ginar claims to have the sympathy of his fellow crewmembers. In the same letters, he also speaks affectionately of Burr, a mechanic robot that frequently assists him in engineering.

4. Crew Stateroom. Quarters for Able Spacehand Gedki Kusperar (gunner) and Petty Officer 3rd Class Ed Urnzida (gunner). A large yellow symbol is spray-painted on the door—an X within a circle. A wooden flute lays on a bed, its bloodstained surface carved with strange patterns.

Kusperar became somewhat unbalanced almost immediately after the ship entered misjump. He was plagued with nightmares and seemed perpetually filled with dread. Later, he was able to accurately foretell which of the crewmembers would die. Day and night, he would flute tunelessly, to the annoyance of his shipmates.

Kusperar was the one to first name the creature "demon," believing it to be a

DECK PLAN KEY Lower Deck Level

1. Avionics sections
2. Access corridor
- 3-6. Crew staterooms
7. Crew common room
8. Cargo hold
9. Reception area
10. Power plant
- 11-12. Maneuver drive
- 13-14. Triple laser turrets
15. Ventral barbette
- 16-17. Service airlocks

Upper Deck Level

- 18-19. Maneuver drive
- 20-21. Fuel scoops
- 22-23. Jump drive access
24. Ward room
25. Galley
26. Sick bay
27. Officers' lounge
28. Captain's stateroom
- 29-31. Officers' staterooms
32. Computer room
33. Main airlock
34. Ship's locker
35. Bridge
36. Avionics
37. Dorsal barbette

20-Ton Gig

38. Central aisle
39. Gig bridge
40. Cargo hold
41. Airlock
42. Low berth
43. Passenger couch
- 44-46. Low berths

mythical monster from his homeworld. He sprinkled garlic salt over the floor of his quarters, wore a white sheet like a poncho and painted the symbol on his door. Each of these actions have some relationship to protection from mythical demons, except the symbol, which seems to have come entirely from his imagination.

If the player characters also try to use wards and protections against mythical demons, these will seem to work for a time, but only because the demon allows them to. The circle-X pattern does have a degree of fascination for the demon. The characters might catch a glimpse of the creature standing almost mesmerized before Kusperar's door.

5. Crew Stateroom. Quarters for Petty Officer 1st Class Fras Vuth (gig pilot) and Dr. Amring Shaiteroy (mission specialist).

A metal case belonging to Shaiteroy has apparently been forced open. Only a few holographic pictures and diagrams are left. They show a pictorial inventory of the artifacts carried aboard the *Gina Bounder*, uncaptioned. These included chunks of monadium, melted bits of transparent material, rings varying from 3-10 centimeters in diameter, a 15-centimeter disk with a grip in the center (the image of the other side is not here), and an ovoid structure (1.5 meters wide and 2.5 meters long), seemingly constructed of a milky-white translucent plastic. A dark shape is visible within.

One picture (produced using special techniques) reveals more detail of the dark shape. It shows a vaguely conical form with three ridges radiating downward from the top. (This is the demon's body, shrouded by its bat-like wings.) From the sides, what might be a tentacle (tail) and part of a claw (taloned foot) are also visible.

6. Crew Stateroom. Quarters for Chief Petty Officer Yeol Jin (chief gunner). Combat demolition gear and a case are on a bed. Inside the case, below the explosives, is a gold disk (about 15 centimeters in diameter), with a grip on its back. It was hastily wrapped in a cloth, but an exposed edge might catch an adventurer's eye.

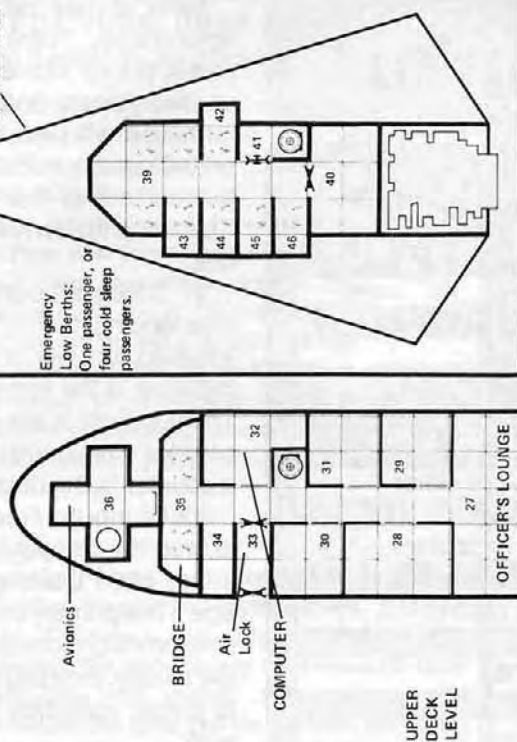
The front of the disk is impressed with a complicated pattern. In fact, the design is somewhat reminiscent of the circle-X pattern drawn by Kusperar. The disk masses about 0.5 kilograms, with a gold value of about Cr3500, but it far exceeds this price for being an artifact of the Ancients.

This symbol was originally used to give the demon orders. If the object is held by a human, the demon will obey his commands. However, the characters do not know the demon's language, nor the proper manner by which commands are given. They can do little more than get the creature to stand mesmerized unless physically disturbed.

At the very least, the demon will not attack whoever bears the disk. If the demon knows in advance that a character has the disk, it will avoid coming in sight.

A facsimile of the disk will have a lesser effect. It could cause the creature

Gazelle Class CLOSE ESCORT



UPPER
DECK
LEVEL

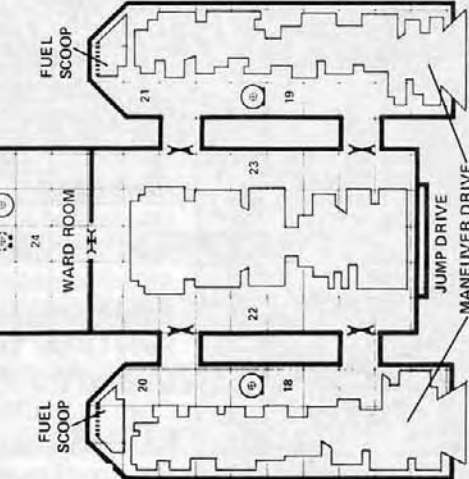
Emergency/
Low Berths:
One passenger, or
four cold sleep
passengers.

Streamlined Hull

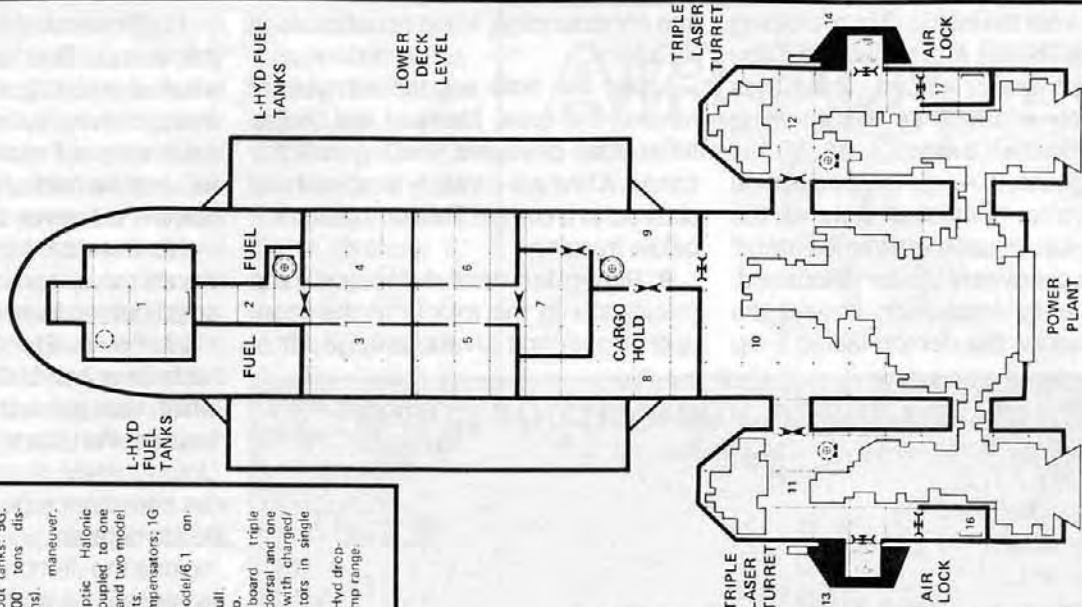


Deck Plan Symbols

- Interior Wall
- - - Sliding Door
- Bulkhead
- Maintenance Hatch
- IRIS VALVE
- MANUAL HATCH
- Hatch
- Overhead
- Overhead
- Floor
- Floor
- Both Floor and Overhead



Tonnage: 300 tons (special).
Dimensions: 48 meters long by 23 meters wide by 8.5 meters high.
Crew: 4 officers, 8 men, No ship's troops.
Jump: 4. In L-Hyd mode: 5. Without tanks: 2.
Acceleration: 4G. Without tanks: 5G.
Power Plant: 5 (at 400 tons displacement), 7 (at 300 tons).
Range: Unlimited maneuver.
One jump: 4, 100 days.
Engineering: Two Triptic Halonic Fusion power plants coupled to one IDC Far Drive jump unit and two model 16 impulse maneuver units.
Gravities: Inertial compensators; 1G floor field.
Electronics: ISMM Model/6.1 on-board computer.
Screens: Armored hull.
Capacity: 6 tons cargo.
Armaments: Dual outboard triple beam laser turrets. One dorsal and one ventral barquette, fitted with charged/neutral particle accelerators in single mounts.
Special Feature: 100-ton L-Hyd drop-pable tanks for greater jump range.



L-HYD FUEL TANKS

FUEL

LOWER DECK LEVEL

L-HYD FUEL TANKS

CARGO HOLD

TRIPLE LASER TURRET

AIR LOCK

POWER PLANT

VENTRAL BARBETTE

DORSAL BARBETTE

PARTICLE ACCELERATOR BARBETTES

to hesitate before attacking. Or it may mesmerize the demon until distracted.

7. Crew Common Room. This room is locked from the inside. Bits of clothing and human bones (the remains of Kagu Duren) are strewn around. The bones are slightly scarred, as if something chewed the flesh away.

8. Cargo Hold. A note is taped beside the iris valve: "Whoever stole all the cans of k-lup, return them immediately!" K-lup is a condiment similar to mustard. Soon after its awakening aboard the *Gina Bounder*, the demon tasted k-lup

and relished it. Thereafter, it took all it could find.

If the demon's intelligence is taken into consideration, K-lup could be used as a lure.

Inside the hold are the remains of most of the crew. Many of the bodies have been devoured, leaving only the bones. A few are carefully wrapped and stacked in a corner. The temperature is below freezing.

9. Reception Area. A decayed lump (meat) sits in the middle of the room upon a metal grid covering a large part of

the floor. A short study will reveal this was meant as a trap to electrocute whatever walks up to take the meat.

12. Starboard Maneuver Drive. In this area is Burr, a somewhat simple-minded mechanical robot used to assist in engineering duties. Basically cylindrical in shape, it moves on treads. It may have some memory of the mutiny or the demon. However, it is out of power.

16. Service Airlock. In here are a dozen empty cans of k-lup and several small human bones.

22. Power Plant. On a maintenance table is a half-built, hand-held device which can generate an intense sound beyond the range of human hearing. Unfortunately, the pitch is also outside the demon's range, but it can be modified to different pitches in hopes of finding one the demon can hear. The effectiveness is up to the referee.

24-26. Ward Room Galley, Sick Bay. Lieutenant Glenna Martin spent her last days here until she was finally taken. She barricaded herself in this segment and thus survived the mutiny. Thereafter, she had frequent contact with the crew about the threat from the demon.

In a refrigeration unit in the sick bay is a frozen shred of tissue from the demon's wing. Martin tried to analyze it, but learned little for lack of skill. Much of her training was in psychology.

Most of her records are kept in holocrystals. There are about 100 of these, poorly labeled and scattered in various places. Searching them for information will take some time but will reveal occasional bits of insight about the actions of the crew (particularly Kuserper), the demon and Martin's theories.

27. Officers' Lounge. The ship's port-side landing floodlight is mounted on a wheeled cart, with dozens of equipment batteries in the base to provide power. The floodlight is aimed down the center corridor. Crewmembers devised this as a counter to the demon's unlight.

32. Computer Room. Crewmembers altered the computer before they were killed, often causing accidental damage. Their primary intention was to erase condemning records, particularly about the mutiny. Bringing the computer back to proper operation will require a lot of work.

But the computer was last ordered to arm the ship's self-destruct device. The first person to use the main keyboard will

BURR, ENGINEERING MECHANIC ROBOT

726x8-N4-LN114-LF24. Cr101,000. 460 kilograms.

Fuel=54.7. Duration=5.7. TL=12.

56/140 (mesh).

2 lt arms, 2 lt tentacles (retractable).

Head (40%).

4 eyes, 2 ears, voder.

2 spotlights (visual spectrum).

Program interface.

Lt laser welder.

Mechanical, electronic tool packages.

Engineering-3, Electronic-1, Mechanical-1, Gravitics-1.

One of the most interesting of the Frontier-area robots is Tukera's 232-BHR-7 starport mechanic. This robot is unique for a single-chassis robot in that it can work on two repair jobs at once if they are in the same area, or if two sets of hands are needed on the same job, the two sets of hands can cooperate.

This robot was not designed for doing heavy hull repairs or lifting. Instead, it was designed for doing delicate work inside control consoles and smaller machinery inside a starship.

Statistics from 101 Robots©1986, Digest Group Publications.

GINA BOUNDER CREW/PASSENGER MANIFEST

Room	Officer Position	Rank/Name
28	Pilot/captain	Captain Troy Emerson
29	Navigator	Lieutenant Commander Udra Zador
30	Engineer	Lieutenant Bruce Aisley
31	Medical officer	Lieutenant Glenna Martin

Room	Crew Position	Rank/Name
3	Driver lackey	Spacehand Apprentice Agid Ginar
3	Gunner	Able Spacehand Kagu Duren
4	Gunner	Able Spacehand Gedki Kuserper
4	Gunner	Petty Officer 3rd Class Ed Umzida
5	Gig pilot	Petty Officer 1st Class Fras Vuth
5	Mission specialist	Dr. Amring Shaiteroy
6	Chief gunner	Chief Petty Officer Yeol Jin
42		Karl Stultz
44	Frozen watch	Sergeant Lowell Millett
45	Frozen watch	Corporal Musin Sasarus
46	Frozen watch	Lance Corporal Benjamin Bromer

initiate the 10-minute timer. Characters may try to abort the computer's count-down, physically disarm the mechanism (area 23) or flee to their own ship.

33. Main Airlock. If the characters try to enter the ship through this airlock, the external indicator will show zero pressure inside. In fact, the pressure within is so high that the meter has broken. The iris value is frozen as a result of warping (not visible), and the electric motor alone cannot open it. Cycling the switch and banging on the hatch as the motor strains, will free it, but with explosive results. Apply mishaps of 3D6 to anyone in front of the hatch from the blast of atmosphere and the body of Lt. Aisley (see below) carried with it.

If they act quickly, the characters can recover the body with appropriate 0G activities.

If the characters approach the airlock from inside the ship, they will find the control panel open with several hasty alterations clearly visible. Even though the pressure meter is obviously broken, a technician can tell from the air lines that the interior is not in vacuum.

The inner iris valve will open a few inches before it freezes, venting the excess pressure. Once pressure is

equalized, cycling the switch will open the door normally.

Inside the airlock is the body of Lieutenant Bruce Aisley, the engineer, his helmet imploded. On his person is a card from the jump drive CPU. Without it, the jump drive will not operate.

34. Ship's Locker. The locker includes vacc suits, PLSSs, cloth armor, blades, laserrifles-9 and shotguns.

40. Gig Cargo Hold. This room has been wrecked by a violent explosion. Most of the gear and equipment stored here was destroyed. The Ancient artifacts were stored here as well, and the most durable

of these have survived. The chunks of monadium, the rings and the military-

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Twin Engine Gaming; Dept 209; 3254 Maple Leaf Ct.; San Jose, CA 95121



rings and the military-white ovoid—now empty—can be found by digging through the debris.

Fiddling with the rings, which are the controls for the ovoid, creates a milky dome around the ovoid. Anyone standing next to it at this time will be drawn into it and placed in stasis. Further fiddling with the rings will release the occupant unharmed. The device can be activated a total of four times before it will no longer operate.

42. Starboard Low Berth. Karl Stultz is a prisoner in a cold berth. If revived, he will pretend to be stunned until he learns more of his situation, then will claim to be a project director, noble liaison to the navy, consultant from a university, or whatever he thinks would give him an advantage in this situation.

In fact, Stultz is a rogue. He slipped into the Victoria system hoping to locate some Ancient artifacts. He was caught, claiming to be a journalist, and put into a cold berth for deportation to Lanth.

44-46 Port Low Berths. These berths contain three marines—Sergeant Lowell Millett, Corporal Musin Sasarus and Lance Corporal Benjamin Bromer. When they were frozen, they knew they were being sent as reserve troops for the navy project at Victoria. But they did not know what their assignments would be.

When they are revived, the gig computer is programmed to explain their purpose and orders. They are to report to Captain Troy Emerson and support

him in providing security for the cargo being transported. Of course, they will be shocked to learn that 200 years have passed since their mission began.

Their combat armor and weapons, stored in the gig's cargo hold, were destroyed.

DEMON

BCDCC2. Age: ?. Terms: N/A. Cr0.

Skills: Unarmed Combat-3, Tactics-3, Stealth-2, JOT-2, 0G Combat-1, Vacc Suit-1.

Psionics (12): Telepathy, Clairvoyance, Telekinesis, Awareness, Teleportation, Droyne Talents, Special (unlight).

The so-called demon is actually either a genetically engineered Droyne warrior or an android of that likeness, designed to kill and terrorize humans. Some factions of the Ancients Final War used humans extensively, often as starship crews. At least one opposing faction used demons to counter the humans by teleporting to a ship and killing in a fashion that would maximize the crew's fear and horror. Stories by the survivors would spread the terror to other ships, which would thereafter avoid the area.

Remarkably cunning, a demon is nearly impossible to evict from a starship once aboard. Its resourcefulness and training are such that even evacuating the ship of air does little good. A demon seldom attacks right away. Aided by psionics, it carefully observes the crew while keeping its presence secret. Then the terror warrior begins a pattern

of stalking and slaying, feeding on the bodies to sustain itself.

The demon almost always uses hand-to-hand combat in its attacks. As a result of martial skills, it has DM of 5+ to hit. Treat its claws and talons as having effective penetration of 8, damage of 4 and weapon defense (block) of 7. Most attacks are made with surprise, and with its Tactics skill, the demon is quite deadly in combat.

A demon has all the psionic skills described in the **Players' Manual**, as well as those mentioned in the **Referee's Companion** possessed by Droyne. Note that Droyne invisibility does not cost anything, but only blots the Droyne's image from the person's mind. A video camera will not fail to record it.

An ability it uses generously is its special talent, unlight;

To suppress all sources of visible light: Routine, Special, Int, 60 seconds.

Referee: The Psi Strength cost is 2+range (with a maximum range of Distant).

All light sources—incandescent, fluorescent, LEDs, lasers of TL12 and below, even fire—will cease emitting visible light. Sensors using infrared or other wavelengths are not affected. But if the visual display is within the field, that will not function, so infrared goggles will not work. Light shining into the envelope from outside, however, will provide illumination.

Note that all to-hit rolls increase one level of difficulty in darkness. Since the demon's visual range also extends well into the infrared, it is not affected by dark surroundings.

The referee should review carefully the rules for psionics in the **Players' Manual** and consider the various options open to the demon. For instance, it might come upon a character invisibly, but let its shadow be plainly seen for psychological affect.

Telepathy may be the demon's best weapon. It can invoke nightmares or force someone into panic with Telepathic fear. It can also send subtle suggestions to someone's mind or transmit messages of doom to a chosen oracle. Most useful of all, it can read the minds of others and anticipate their actions. But the referee should assume that it seldom uses this so that it can apply its psionic strength in other ways. Otherwise, it will likely succeed in countering the group's every move. Ω

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Karl Stultz (Rogue): 6A9BA5. Age: 38. 5 terms. Cr60,000.

Skills: Handgun-1, JOT-2, Liaison-1, Carousing-2, Streetwise-1, Forgery-1, Ship's Boat-1, Computer-0, Wheeled Vehicle-0.

Body Pistol, High Passage.

Starport A, Medium, Standard, Wet World, High Pop, High Law, Early Stellar.

Lowell Millett (Marine Sergeant): A78977. Age: 30. 3 terms. Cr25,000.

Skills: Laser Weapons-1, Combat Rifleman-1, 0G Combat-1, Brawling-1, Large Blade-1, Vacc Suit-0, Grav Vehicle-0, Computer-0.

Starport B, Medium, Standard, Wet World, Mod Pop, Mod Law, Avg Stellar.

Musin Sasarus (Marine Corporal): 96B974. Age: 26. 2 terms. Cr5000.

Skills: Laser Weapons-2, Demolitions-1, Carousing-1, Large Blade-1, Vacc Suit-0, Grav Vehicle-0, Computer-0.

Starport A, Small, Standard, Desert World, Mod Pop, Mod Law, High Stellar.

Benjamin Bromer (Marine Lance Corporal): 988662. Age: 26. 2 terms. Cr30,000.

Skills: Laser Weapons-1, Electronics-1, Gambling-1, Large Blade-1, Vacc Suit-0, Grav Vehicle-0, Computer-0.

Starport B, Medium, Standard, Wet World, Mod Pop, Mod Law, Avg Stellar.

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**Find out firsthand
just how seriously some Vargr
take their games.**

By Philip Athans

Dtorg (Provence 1711 D6775A7-8 Ag) is a healthy agricultural world with more food than it knows what to do with. Only one parsec Rimward lies Aeghvoekogz, a rich world with 765 million mouths to feed and an aggressive consumer food-processing industry constantly in need of raw ingredients.

A little wheeling and dealing with a local farm combine on Dtorg bought the PCs a cargo hold full of tsaerkin, a soy-like plant that a good chemist can make taste like anything. One jump later and they're on Aeghvoekogz with a cargo that cost them Cr3350 per ton. Their contact was sure they'd be able to get Cr6700 per ton for it on Aeghvoekogz. With hopes of a big profit, the PCs post the availability of their cargo at Khoerghiz Downport and wait.

1. COMMERCE (KEY)

The PCs try to sell their cargo.

Location: Khoerghiz Downport on Aeghvoekogz.

Scene: The PCs have been on Aeghvoekogz for almost two standard days (and it's been daylight the whole time), but they still haven't found a buyer for their hold full of tsaerkin. That's not a completely unheard of wait, and Aeghvoekogz seems like a relatively nice, though uncomfortably hot, world. Still, the PCs' "sure thing" is starting to seem less and less sure. And the tsaerkin in their hold would probably go bad before they could get to the next system.

The PCs may be considering bugging out and trying the tsaerkin somewhere else when a message comes over the starport commlink from a local cargo broker representing "someone of importance who might be interested in what you have to sell."

Action: The broker who contacts the PCs is an employee of Logzaenunuekotskhun Imports (LI). Though the broker won't mention his employer by name, the "someone of importance" is the head of the company, Ellu Logzaenunuekotskhun. If the PCs agree to the meeting, the broker arranges for Ellu to meet them after the next siesta, seven hours from now, at the PCs' ship.

If the PCs take a couple of hours to check up on the broker, they find him registered at the starport and equipped with all the best credentials. His official ties to LI are well known, and no one makes any attempt to hide them. If the PCs check into Ellu, use the following task:

To find information on Ellu:

Routine, Streetwise or Admin, Int, 15 min (uncertain).

Referee: A no truth result means the PCs find out only that Ellu is a local merchant who heads a large import/export company based at Khoerghiz Downport. On some truth, the PCs find out that Ellu is also a world-famous Tsaeghoz player. Finding out what Tsaeghoz is will be easy—it's all over the local media. On total truth, the PCs discover that Ellu is actually considered the best player ever to enter a Tsaeghoz arena.

Seven hours later, the broker arrives at the PCs' ship in the company of a tall athletic Vargr with the air of an aristocrat. This is Ellu Logzaenunuekotskhun. The broker introduces Ellu and then steps back in deference to his superior. Ellu conducts the rest of the meeting himself. His personal charisma is the most important thing in his universe—if the PCs behave like "unprincipled humans," he becomes indignant and challenges them to meet at the Tsaeghoz arena at sunset (four standard days from now).

If the PCs show Ellu the respect he is due, he offers them Cr5020 per ton. This figure is well below what the PCs consider the going rate for tsaerkin on Aeghvoekogz. Ellu will not change this figure, up or down, for any reason.

The truth is, Ellu couldn't care less about the PCs' load of tsaerkin or the business transaction at all—he just wants to anger the PCs so they will insult him. Once he is insulted, he can challenge them to a game of Tsaeghoz. This is especially true if the PCs are human. Humans are rare this far into the Provence sector and will make unusual opponents certain to increase the night's game's media ratings (and

Ellu's personal cut) dramatically.

Once the PCs have done anything, consciously or unconsciously, to insult Ellu, proceed with nugget 2.

Ellu Logzaenunuekotskhun

Vargr merchant prince.

AFA99D. Hits: 5/7. Age: 38. 5 terms. Cr57.75 million.

Infighting-4, Tactics-3, Laser Weapon-2, Small Blade-2, Trader-1, Pilot-1, Scrounging-1, Vacc Suit-0, Computer-0, Grav Vehicle-0.

Starport B, Medium, Standard, Wet, High Pop, Low Law, Average Stellar.

Ellu grew up with every young Aeghvoekogzian's obsession with Tsaeghoz. Like many, he never grew out of this obsession. He played on several championship teams and even led the Aeghvoe national team to a World Cup victory in 643 VeGF (1107 Im).

Ellu is a serious, well-trained and talented player, and is obsessive about his playing style. He is ruthless and cold in the arena. He is as acutely aware of his personal charisma as most Vargr, if not more so.

Like most Vargr of his station, Ellu speaks very slowly and somewhat unclearly in all of his dealings. By doing this, he exhibits his higher charisma by forcing others to wait for him to finish speaking. If he is interrupted, he will lose face. This is one more way for Ellu to make his challenge.

2. CHALLENGE (KEY)

Ellu challenges the PCs to a game of Tsaeghoz.

Location: The PCs' ship, at Khoerghiz Downport.

Scene: The towering Vargr merchant suddenly grows indignant and scowls at the PCs as if they've said the one single thing that would make him lose control and kill them on the spot. His voice is deep, rumbling growl as he says: "I ... will have ... satisfaction."

Tilting his head back, he lets loose a terrible howl that echoes through the cargo hold for what seems like hours. He glowers as the echoes fade, then turns to look at his broker, who nods fearfully. Glancing back only once with burning eyes, the merchant stalks away. No amount of apologizing will get Ellu to change his mind.

Action: The howl that Ellu let loose was the Aeghvoekogzian traditional Cry of Challenge. When Ellu is gone from sight, the broker will tell the PCs that they've been challenged to a game of Tsaeghoz by the current champion. He tells them they may either accept or decline the challenge. If they accept, they may send either one of their number against Ellu one-on-one, or all of them against Ellu and his teammates (the world championship team). The fight will be to the death. If the PCs are unfamiliar with the concept of Tsaeghoz, the broker will refer them to a local information grid, where they can access a description of the game.

The broker warns the PCs that if they decline the challenge, Ellu will be considered to have won. The PCs will be treated as cowards. No one on Aeghvoekogz will do business with

MEGATRAVELLER

them and they'll be stuck with a hold full of rotting tsaerkhin.

The broker will give the PCs two hours to call back with their answer. If the PCs investigate their opponent further, go to nugget 3. If they do not investigate Ellu, go to nugget 4 if they decline his challenge or nugget 5 if they accept his challenge.

3. INFRINGEMENT

The PCs find out some interesting facts about Ellu.

Location: Khoerghiz Downport.

Scene: The pungent smoke that curls out of the dark-furred Vargr's mouth almost makes the PCs gag. Lasers tease their eyes to the floorshow, and the Vargr chuckles weakly. "So," he says with a puff of smoke, "You want to know about old Ellu, eh?" He sucks at the ornate pipe once more then speaks roughly, trying to hold smoke in his lungs. "He's not so tough, y'know. But then again—who is?"

Action: How they proceed in digging for information about Ellu is up to the PCs. Most PCs will probably try the old starport hangout method of investigation. Some will be high-tech about it and start computer hacking. Either way, they'll eventually come up with some very interesting facts:

- Ellu has a lot of enemies on Aeghvoekogz. Some people don't like winners very much.
- Ellu is extraordinarily self-confident (a side-effect of prolonged combat drug use) and can be careless at times, especially with information and especially around people of lower station, whom he refuses to see as a threat.
- Vargr love a hero, but they also love to see heroes fall. Causing charisma loss in others is a good way for Vargr to gain charisma for themselves. Whoever brings down Ellu will have a lifetime of bragging rights.

• Ellu has caused the "fall from grace" of many, many Vargr on Aeghvoekogz. Some extremely intelligent, well-educated and resourceful people would love to get back at him.

Ellu also has a big secret: For eight years, Ellu and his teammates have been using Fhoeks-5, an advanced combat drug developed by and available from a local corsair organization. Since use of combat drugs of any kind is expressly forbidden by the rules of Tsfaeghoz, this information, if released, would absolutely shatter Ellu's career, leaving his life in ruins.

Go to nugget 4 if the PCs decline Ellu's challenge or nugget 5 if they accept his challenge.

4. ACT OF COWARDICE

The PCs decline the challenge.

Location: Aeghvoekogz.

Scene: The holovid networks are full of it: "offworld cowards," "Human weaklings." The PCs are being called everything in the book—except smart for not accepting a challenge to play a game they've never heard of against the best player ever to step into a Tsfaeghoz arena.

Action: If the PCs refuse to meet Ellu in the Tsfaeghoz arena, the same media machine that would have hyped the fight begins to disgrace the PCs in front of everyone on Aeghvoekogz. At this point, there's very little left for the PCs to do. Absolutely no one at any of the starports on Aeghvoekogz will give them one red Varroerthic for their tsaerkhin.

There are plenty of rival companies that would be more than

happy to pick up what Ellu left behind, but none would dare incur his wrath by interfering in one of his "Tsfaeghoz deals." Besides, it would mean a considerable loss of face to anyone who would deal with such infamous cowards as the PCs.

No matter how hard they try, the PCs have a very tough time finding any sympathy on Aeghvoekogz, though some denizens of Khoerghiz Downport's startown district might still lend a hand. Many of them were disgraced in much the same way in years past.

The crowd of curious and antagonistic Vargr continues to grow outside their ship, and the local authorities will only intervene to protect starport property. They will not come between the crowd and the PCs or their ship, and if anything resembling a battle ensues, the PCs will be held fully responsible, not the angry mob. The crowd will keep its cool until sunset (the time the game should have been played), then will attack the PCs' ship.

If the PCs decide to bug out, an anonymous package arrives at their ship. After a few tense moments wondering if it's a bomb, the PCs discover that it contains an undercover holovid revealing Ellu's secret drug habit.

The PCs' final option is to contact Ellu's offices and agree to the game. If they wait until sunset it will be too late and they'll end up at the mercy of the angry locals.

Proceed to nugget 6.

5. MEDIA CIRCUS

Ellu announces the fight to the press.

Location: On Aeghvoekogz.

Scene: The PCs have accepted the merchant's challenge and are trying to clear their heads when the computer warns them that an important news flash is coming off the local feeds. They turn on the viewer, and there's Ellu standing with several other husky looking Vargr amidst a crowd of camera-toting reporters. "They have agreed to fight me," Ellu says, slowly. "Perhaps they do not realize where they've come and whom they've insulted. I will crush them."

Action: Having accepted Ellu's challenge, the PCs are thrown headlong into the local media spotlight. Their names and faces appear in every city all across Aeghvoekogz. Though they may never have heard of the game of Tsfaeghoz until a few days ago, they're suddenly contenders for the championship title.

Reporters are constantly clamoring outside the PCs' ship. The adventurers are offered everything from holovid interviews to product endorsements. The personal charisma of the PCs rises by two points after having accepted the challenge. Though many media sportscasters call them "rank amateurs" and "dead meat," most inhabitants think rather highly of them that they stayed to fight.

As they enjoy their celebrity status, the PCs are surprised by the arrival of an anonymous package. It contains an undercover holovid revealing Ellu's secret drug habit.

Proceed to nugget 6.

6. BAD PRESS

The media gets wind of Ellu's cheating.

Location: On Aeghvoekogz.

Scene: Taken with a hidden camera by an understandably fearful cameraman, the undercover holovid shows Ellu and

three of his teammates sitting in a circle in some kind of locker room. They pass a small, needle-tipped vial around, each injecting himself with a clear liquid—obviously some kind of drug. They shake as if in some sort of sudden state of euphoria, then stand in unison and burst toward a door. The camera hurriedly follows them as they emerge into a packed arena of thousands of cheering fans.

With a little bit of computer enhancement, the holovid reveals markings on the side of the vial which unquestionably identifies the substance as the combat drug Fhoeks-5.

Action: If the PCs do not reveal the undercover holovid to the media and go through with the challenge, go to nugget 7.

If the PCs threaten Ellu with this information, he offers them Cr6900 per ton of their cargo (and will go as high as Cr7500) if they promise to keep their discovery under their hats and leave Aeghvoekogz forever. He then has one of his teammates place a bomb in the PCs' vessel in an attempt to kill them before they reveal this damning information. Go to nugget 8.

If the PCs give the undercover holovid to the media, either anonymously or on the record, word spreads like wildfire that Ellu has been caught cheating at Tsfaeghoz. His personal charisma plummets; business contacts dry up; product endorsements are withdrawn; and he is banned from the Tsfaeghoz arena. At the referee's discretion, Ellu might come gunning for the PCs. In this case, the local authorities side with the PCs against the fallen hero. Go to nugget 8.

If the PCs bypass the media and take the undercover holovid to the authorities, the local law enforcement gives the PCs eight hours to leave Aeghvoekogz for good, taking their full cargo load of tsaerkhin with them. If the PCs stay to see what the cops will do, they face arrest for various (trumped up) safety code and customs violations. Ellu has his own men in the starport authority who want to keep the matter quiet. Go to nugget 8.

7. TSFAEGHOZ! (OPTIONAL KEY)

The PCs meet Ellu for a game of Tsfaeghoz.

Location: National Tsfaeghoz Arena.

Scene: Media reports before the game announce another sold-out match. Even in the ready rooms deep below the floor of the arena, the PCs can hear the roar of the crowd, 125,000 strong, as they incessantly chant, "Ellu! Ellu! Ellu!" An arena staffer sticks his head in the door and says, "15 minutes," then disappears.

Action: Some or all of the PCs meet Ellu alone or with his teammates for a game of Tsfaeghoz in front of a crowd of 125,000 Vargr and a holovid audience of 550 million.

The PCs receive a blood test and several other medical examinations five minutes before the game. Ellu has paid his doctors to ignore the Fhoeks-5 in his team's systems. The PCs' doctors will ignore nothing.

Refer to Rules of the Game for information on how to administer the combat game. Keep in mind that this game isn't being played on Earth. The local gravity is a bit more than half that of Earth's, and the temperature is around 39° C (very hot).

Rules of the Game

Tsfaeghoz has been played on Aeghvoekogz for well over 100 (Imperial standard) years. It is a pastime of international import and is taken very seriously by a vast majority of the population. So much

so, in fact, that literally thousands of players are willing to risk their lives for a chance at stardom in the arena.

The game is actually quite simple.

An equal number of opponents (one-on-one or up to 15 on each side) meet in an enclosed arena, completely naked, and fight it out. The winner is the one left standing at the end of the game. In the case of team play, every member of the opposing team must be eliminated from play. Players are considered eliminated when they are killed or their death is assured (they're rendered unconscious or effectively restrained), but their lives are spared by their opponents.

Though Tsfaeghoz is often fought to the death, it need not be. Often, it is charismatically advantageous not to kill your opponent.

The following rules always apply and are rigorously enforced:

- No weapons or armor of any kind are permitted in the arena.
- No cybernetic or artificial implants. Anyone with such devices must have them surgically removed before the game or forfeit the match.
- No drugs of any kind can be present in a player's system, nor will a player be permitted to carry any drugs or medical supplies of any kind into the arena.
- No robots are allowed to act as Tsfaeghoz players under any circumstances.
- No player may enter or exit the arena after play has begun. There are no substitutions.

Tsfaeghoz games are held at sunset once every two local days (five standard 24-hour days) at various locations across Aeghvoekogz.

Since Tsfaeghoz is a Vargr game, charisma plays a major role. Players compete for the right to be considered "best" or at least "better." Though it's up to the referee to assign specific charisma gain or loss, the following guidelines should be kept in mind: Charisma gain increases for the victor with the length of the fight—if it takes you longer to win, your opponent was a more worthy adversary, and you deserve more respect for beating him. Also, the fighter with the lower charisma at the beginning of the fight stands to gain more charisma than his opponent. If your opponent is incapacitated or rendered unconscious, it is uncharismatic to kill him. Anyone can kill a sleeping man. If he is removed from play, he is beaten, and there is no need to kill him.

The Tsfaeghoz Arena is a huge coliseum with seating for 125,000 people. In the center of the square arena floor is a raised dais. Atop the dais is a large hole. This is the entrance to a 10-meter-deep pit which has served as the final resting place for several contenders. At the corners of the arena floor are four platforms, each two meters tall. They are part of the arena floor and cannot be toppled or moved. The floor of the arena is perfectly flat and made from a hard substance similar to poured concrete. There are absolutely no loose items that can be used as weapons. The arena is open to the air, and games take place regardless of local weather conditions. The arena floor is well lit by the stadium lights. Eight ornate portculli open onto the arena floor. The chal-

MEGATRAVELLER

lengers enter from the odd-numbered gates, and the champions from the even-numbered gates.

8. GOOD-BYE AEGHVOEKOGZ

The PCs leave Aeghvoekogz.

Location: Khoerghiz Downport.

Scene: As the hum of your thrusters starts to vibrate through the ship, you get one more chance to look out across the wide tarmac of Khoerghiz Downport. It'll be awhile before you forget this trip.

Action: This nugget wraps up Wolfspout and the PCs' adventures on Aeghvoekogz. What happens here depends completely on the decisions the PCs have made throughout the adventure.

If the PCs back down from Ellu's challenge, they'll be leaving in disgrace. If they decline the challenge and stay past sunset, the mob attacks, and they'll be leaving behind a full-scale riot. Either way, the tsaerkin in their cargo hold will rot before they get to the next world.

If the PCs give the starport authorities the information they discovered on Ellu's combat drug use, they'll be forced to leave or face arrest. Again, the tsaerkin in their cargo hold will rot before they get to the next world.

If the PCs exposed Ellu's wrong-doing to the media, they'll receive several bids on their cargo from Ellu's long-silent enemies. The PCs should end up with at least Cr6800 per ton for their troubles.

If the PCs face down Ellu in the arena and win, Ellu will agree to pay Cr6500 per ton of their tsaerkin, then try to convince them to stay for a re-match.

This scenario can be used as a springboard for future adventures. Ellu might not take defeat or disgrace too well,

and may use his considerable financial resources to hunt the PCs down. The PCs may actually like Tsfaeghoz and decide to stay and try their hand as regular contestants, or return from time to time as a travelling team.

Aeghvoekogz (Gveghz/Provence 1712)

A564875-C Ri 721 Ve G3 V M1 D

Mean Orbital Radius: 1 AU **Orbital Period:** 367.09 standard days **Rotation Period:** 99.99 standard days (239.76 hours) **Axial Tilt:** 24 degrees **Orbital Eccentricity:** 0.01 **Diameter:** 8010 km **Density:** 0.94 (molten core) **Mass:** 0.23 **Gravity:** 0.59G **Satellites:** None **Hydrographic Percentage:** 42% (liquid water) **Atmosphere:** Standard, oxygen-nitrogen mix **Atmospheric Pressure:** 0.90 **Mean Surface Temperature:** 46.55° C **Population:** 765 million.

Resources: Ores, compounds, metals, nonmetals, parts, consumables, art forms, software and documents.

Government: Balkanized, 6 nations (Aeghvoe, Kogz, Gzargig, Vorkez, Nullu Vaer and Zoertsu Vaer) **Progressiveness:** Progressive/advancing **Aggressiveness:** Passive/neutral **Extensiveness:** Fragmented/friendly **Tech:** High common C, low common A.

Aeghvoekogz is a rich world typical of the decaying Empire of Varroerth. Though its six independent nations rarely agree on anything, hostilities are extremely rare. The citizens of Aeghvoekogz seem content with taking care of business matters and seeing to their own personal entertainment. Because of Aeghvoekogz' long daylight and night periods, each 60-hour day is broken up by five strictly controlled siestas of five hours each, equally spaced throughout the day. It is a criminal offense to work during these periods, and businesses (except essential services) are mandated to completely cease operations during siestas. Ω

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The Only Good Monster is a Dead Monster

General Rockard was one of those guys who generated rumors—rumors that couldn't be proved or disproved because if he even sneezed, it was top secret. He'd been a hitter since 'Nam, a sniper.

He graduated from there to ultrasecret dirty work—assassination, sabotage, government-sanctioned terrorism and insurrection. If it was violence you needed, Rockard could provide. He always took the toughest jobs, the suicide missions. Of course, no one ever wanted to work with him. To his credit, he didn't lose very many men, but a lot of them came back in pieces.

If he'd been a Viking, they'd have called him a berserker. The running gag was that he was a few rounds short of a full magazine. I'm not real surprised that he's still around. Someone watches out for children and crazy people.

But imagine my shock when he contacted me. That's like being called to dice with death. I might not win, but the game won't be boring.

This adventure is for 2-6 players. At least one PC must be military or ex-military, preferably special forces, force recon or sniper. The group should also include at least one psychic—either PC or NPC.

A PC is contacted secretly by General Rockard, who requests a meet with the adventurer and any friends he has that are known for hunting Dark Minions. He promises a good time (in Rockard's parlance, that means a desperate battle) and \$10,000 per soldier for a "little job."

Rockard will agree to meet the PCs at a place of their choosing. He'll show up at the appointed place and time, in dress appropriate to the venue. He looks like an aging Hercules, complete with a fierce, mad gleam in his blue eyes, and his face bears many small scars. His only weapon is a COP .357 backup gun.

As soon as the general is alone with the adventurers, he will take a penlight-like device from his pocket and turn it on, pointing it at a wall or other neutrally colored surface. It is a small image projector, and it displays an aerial photograph of a small, unidentified island, a tropical one to judge from the foliage.

"Awright, troops, listen up," he barks. "You're here because you know about the monsters, the ones the government says don't exist. We know better." He pauses and grins. "Either that, or the money sounded good."

He explains that the island, a former US military installation, now houses an enemy base. The installation was abandoned back in the '90s during budget cutbacks. A satellite photo suggested that it had been recently reoccupied by someone—or something.

"I took a team in," Rockard recounts, "and I was the only one to come out. I don't remember much. The psych boys say I may never remember; a sanity block of some kind. The brass said forget it; I said no way. No one and nothing beats General Rockard." The opposition is crafty. But they're easy to identify—they're monsters. Never trust a monster—shoot it! It's you or them." He grinds his teeth with rage, jaw muscles standing out and face reddening with fury.

Rockard explains that the enemy has converted the armory into a lab and is building something there. He wants to know what they're up to—and stop it.

Entry for the mission will be by boat and extraction by chopper. The group will travel by foot, and should be in and out within 24 hours. Rockard tallies up the equipment the PCs have—he'll provide any extra gear needed—and asks them to meet at a nearby bus terminal in 24 hours. "Keep your gear concealed, boys and girls," he admonishes. "This is a secret mission." He pulls out a wad of cash, \$1000 per adventurer. "A little seed money for gear."

The general leaves quickly and loses any followers within a half-mile, vanishing before their eyes. If psychic characters try to probe the general, Human Empathy reveals a deep hatred pulsing inside him—the general hates, hates, hates monsters. He's not suicidal, but he'd go pretty far to kill them. His intellectual thoughts are on the mission. Stage Three and up success (enabling the psychic to read the general's subconscious) is confusing. It's as if the general has a dual personality. There's an inhumanly cold and intense overmind, a superego (by Freudian terms), controlling him with exact mechanical precision, but underneath lies a seething, patho-

logical mire of pure aggression, directed (at the moment) at monsters. The general is a walking weapon; there's very little humanity left to him.

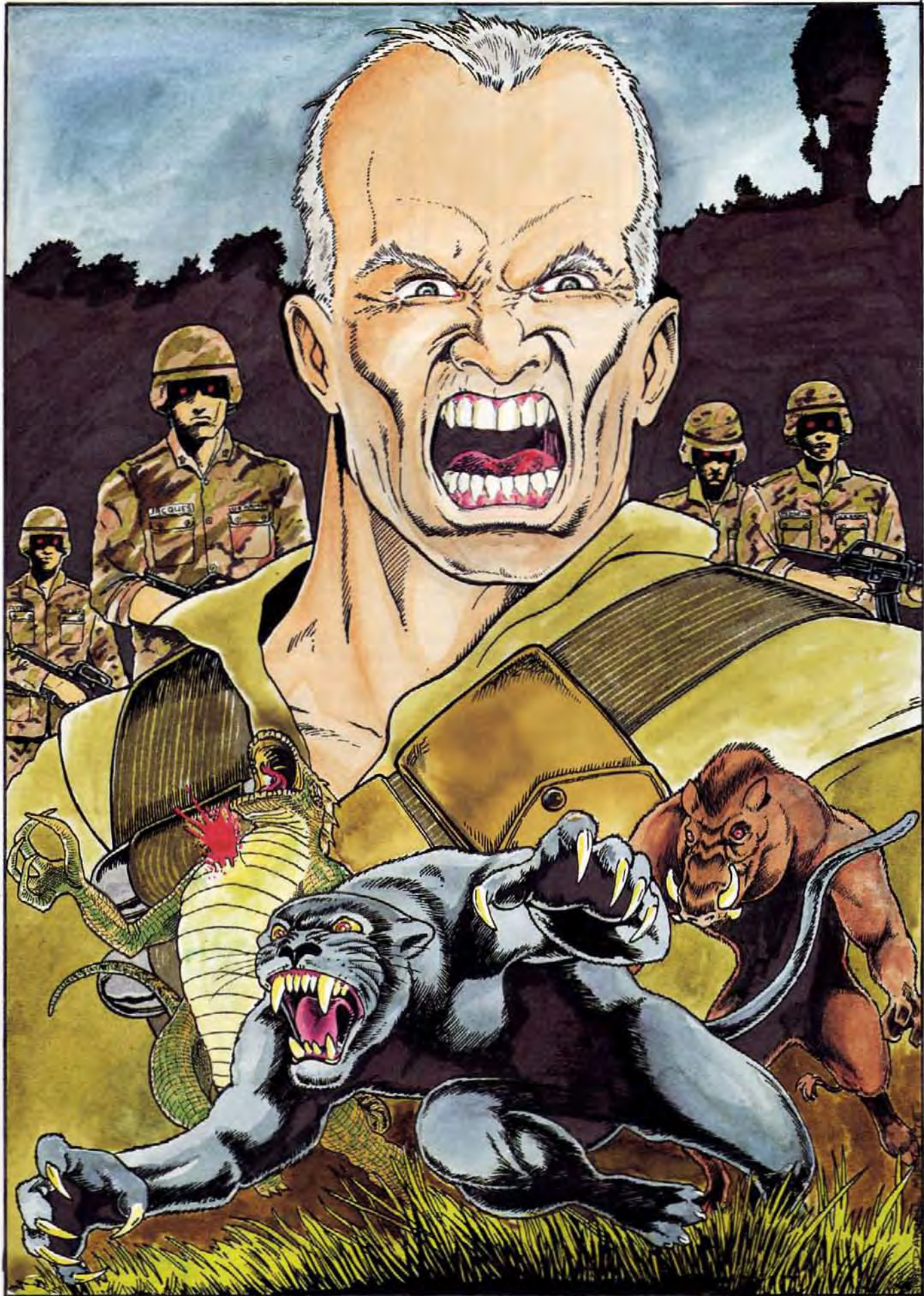
PREPARATIONS

The adventurers have 24 hours to get ready for a jungle plunge. They can use the time to buy new gear, research the mission, or just rest up and get ready.

Any new gear they buy has to be readily available (which normally means legal) because there isn't time to arrange to meet with most contacts—the corner mechanic is okay, but calling a friend at the Pentagon to ship you a tank is out.

Researching the mission is interesting. Comparing the general's memory of the island with the thousands of small islands dotting the globe is a lengthy process, made slightly easier by the fact that it had a US base on it. Still, several islands could fit the bill, all in the South Pacific, all small and insignificant, all devoid of any interesting information. If the adventurers try to tap their military network contacts, reactions range from stunned incredulity ("I didn't know about this!") to resignation ("So Rock-Hard's going on another safari? Have fun, and make sure your insurance covers gunfire.") to concern ("Rockard's 100% nuts. Watch your back.").

One contact has useful information: "Rockard is completely on his own on this venture. He's supposed to be in recovery in an institution. You know the last time he went there, he disappeared? So did all his men. Then he pops up, fresh as a daisy and looking like nothing happened. And he remembers nothing, nothing at all! Going back is an obsession with him—he wants to find out what happened."

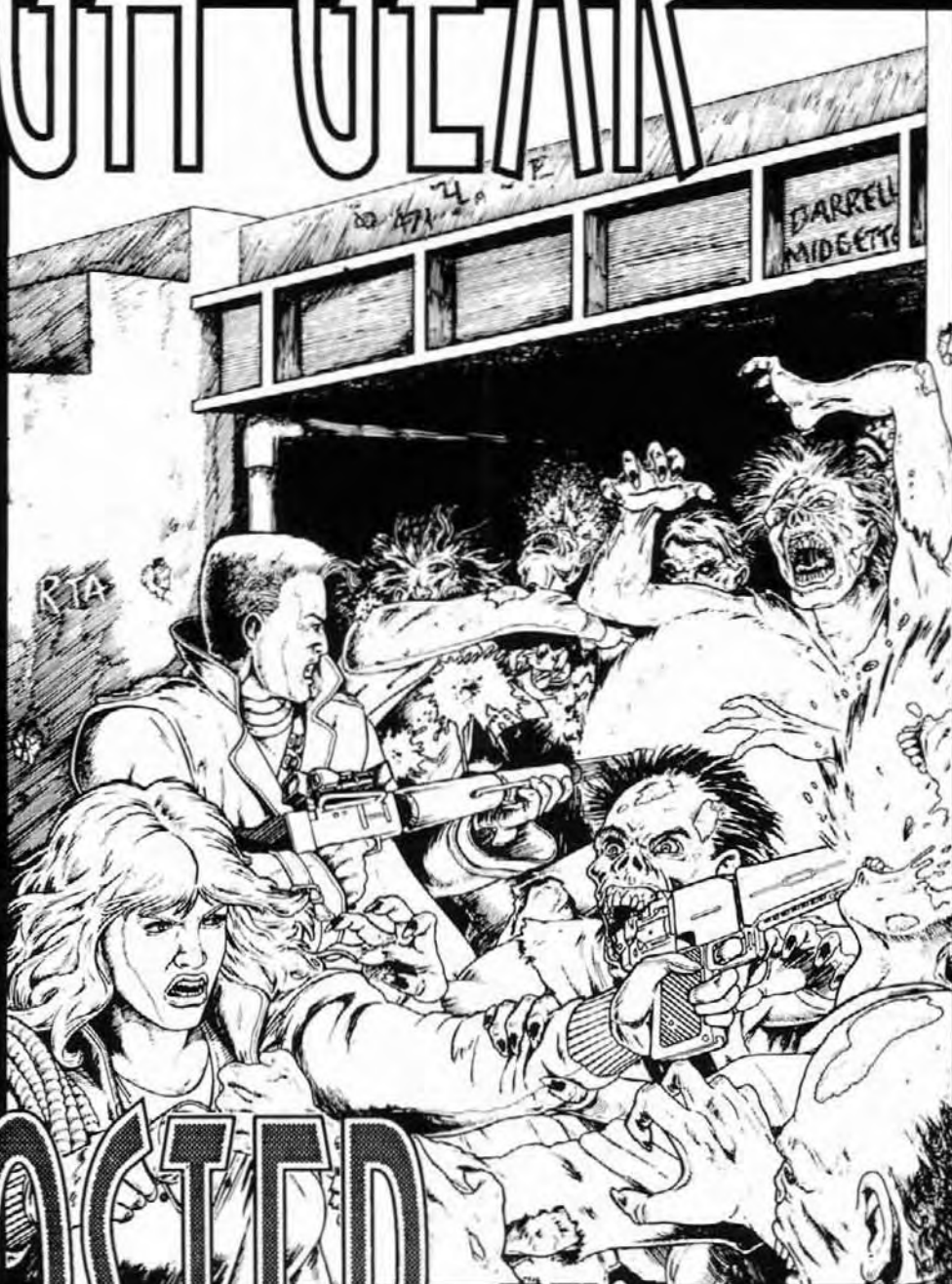


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ISLAND EXPRESS

At the appointed hour, a bus pulls up at the terminal. The sign on it reads "Island Express," and the uniformed driver is General Rockard. Once outside the city, Rockard turns the vehicle off the main road and drives carefully up a rutted side road for 10 minutes. When firmly out of sight, he stops the bus. "Everybody off! Unload and check your gear. I've got additional gear for you, and you need familiarization training."

Rockard unloads several bulky bags from the cargo compartment as the PCs line up. At least one of his bags is field equipment for any PCs who don't already have it. It's a standard US field kit, as outlined in *Twilight: 2000*—a set of jungle fatigues and poncho, combat webbing, pack, shelter half, two canteens, sleeping bag, flashlight, personal medical kit, kevlar flak vest and kevlar helmet, for a total weight of 20 kilograms. He has a set of IR goggles for everyone; a crate is full of grenades for those who want them; and one bag holds a half-dozen plastic-wrapped rifles with five magazines each.

Issuing the rifles to the PCs, Rockard explains, "This is the XM22 AIW, the most advanced combat rifle in the world. It's experimental and extremely lethal. Each clip holds 50 rounds. It's a simple weapon, easy to shoot, so I expect you to be experts by the time you finish 50 rounds! Furthermore, you'll find instruction manuals that teach field-stripping and maintenance. Study them!" He assists the PCs in learning how to use the rifles, glancing at the sky occasionally.

After an hour of practice and drill, an airplane passes low over the party, its huge wingtip props rotating to become VTOL rotors, and touches down nearby. The plane's markings have been hastily obscured with spray paint, but the stenciled notations on its skin mark it as military as surely as any insignia.

The plane's crew is a pair of tight-lipped soldiers. They speak only to give instructions, and the crew compartment is closed for the 10-hour journey (the airplane refuels in mid-air three times).

Rockard settles the adventurers in and spends the rest of the time sleeping, dropping off as soon as he hits the seat. Smart PCs do the same. Ex-military types know that this is the last uninterrupted rest they'll have for some time. Curious adventurers can look out the windows and watch the ground slip away to ocean as the plane flies west—but this gets boring after awhile.

Ten hours out, the intercom barks for the general. He goes forward to the cockpit for a minute, then returns to address the PCs. "We're maneuvering to drop us off at sea. Get your gear and be ready." He opens a side door as the airplane slows to hover over a ship, a tramp freighter by the looks of it. When the plane is only about six feet off the deck, he jumps out. "Follow me!" He lands on the deck and rolls to his feet without effort, then catches any PCs who aren't used to jumping, setting them on their feet.

A ship's officer greets the party and leads them belowdeck to a set of small staterooms. "We'll be in position to launch you by tomorrow night," he declares. "Please remain in your cabins and don't go up on deck."

The PCs spend the next night and day cooped up in their cabins. Finally, it's time. Rockard tells them to gather their gear and follow him. They go down into the hold, which is filled with a maintenance bay and aircraft elevator, complete with a transport heli and a *Comanche* attack chopper. The aft section of the ship features a ramp and clamshell doors, obvious from the inside. A hovercraft, armed for war, rests on the ramp. Rockard flings his two duffle bags into the crew compartment and boards. As soon as the party is aboard, the stern of the ship opens and the hovercraft shoots out into the darkness.

"Awright, get yourselves ready to go," Rockard orders, beginning to remove items from his own bags. "It's not a long trip, and as soon as the hover runs up on the shore, we bail out. And remember this: They'll be monitoring Frequency One—the emergency freak. The pickup signal is 'Ford, Dodge, Chevy.' That'll call in the choppers—don't use it unless I'm out of action. Repeat the signal at two-minute intervals, and they'll home in on your signal."

Rockard slings on a heavy, solid backpack, belts on an oversized buttpack, crams every voluminous pocket with gear, grenades, and ammunition, drapes two bandoleers over his flak jacket (one loaded with launcher grenades, the other loaded with ammo clips), fits on a holster holding a Wilcox .457, straps on a steel helmet and takes up an M21 rifle modified to carry an M203 PI grenade launcher underneath. Shortly thereafter, the hover stops and the forward ramp opens—Rockard must be hauling more than 70 kilos, but he moves out as if unhindered by the weight. As soon as the adventurers have moved out of the hover, it reverses its engines and slips off the shore. The group is alone.

THE NIGHT HAS EYES

The sound of the ocean breeze whistling through the palms, the heavy scents of hot-house flowers and the tepid temperature confirm that the island is tropical. The darkness is nearly complete since there is no moon. Only starlight provides any visibility. "IR goggles," the general murmurs. Once the adventurers put on their goggles, they see that the general has a powerful IR flashlight. He leads the way into the jungle, proceeding along a game trail. "We need to find a good place to wait, out of sight, until dawn. I think I've got just the place."

An eerie, wolfish howl echoes through the jungle, answered by caws, screeches, chirps and ratcheting sounds. Jungle veterans recognize most of the sounds, but some utter-

ances in the chorus are unnatural. The unnatural howl seems to have been the signal for nocturnal activity. It is not repeated, but the adventurers are now plagued by rustling noises in the underbrush and a constant stream of jungle noises.

To increase tension, the referee should roll 1D10 at random intervals and announce to a PC that he sees/senses movement nearby. If any of the PCs open fire, Rockard rounds on them and hisses furiously, "What do you think you're doing?! If you give away our position, we're all dead. Or worse. Unload that piece and put it on safety if you can't control it!" He looks at the rest of the group. "As a matter of fact, that's not a bad idea. Clear your chambers and safety everything! Use hand weapons only." He slings his custom-built combi-weapon and draws a machete from the side of his pack. "We use extreme silence from here on out."

As the strike group winds its way along the game path, the PCs feel eyes on them. Something is watching them. They know it. Characters with Foreboding can sense the danger, like a cold, carnal breath ghosting past them on the humid tropical air. If a psychic uses Human Empathy, he feels malice all around, like a ring of excited hatred. It's tenuous, not capable of being pinned down. And it's stronger, so much stronger, ahead. In the direction of the target installation. If a psychic uses Animal Empathy, the impression is many times worse. There are animal things, not real animals, out there in the jungle. They roam, prowling the pathways, slaving and lusting for the taste of human flesh. The effect is overwhelming—have the psychic roll 1D6 against his Initiative. If the roll is over the Initiative score, the psychic is reduced to a frightened, whimpering mass. Once the psychic contact is broken, the fear retreats—but does not disappear completely.

Note: The Moreau creatures are instinctively using their Project Emotion powers to reach out and terrify their prey. This is reinforced by the power projected from the aliens' lab ahead.

DANCES IN THE DARK

Seemingly unaffected by the trepidation which haunts the other adventurers, Rockard leads the way through the jungle to a small clearing nestled beneath a grove of tall, thick trees. "We camp here until 0500," he announces. "Get some rest while you can." He strings a hammock between two trees, climbs in and drops off instantly, his M21/M203 combo across his massive chest. The sounds that spooked the PCs earlier have followed them here, and the night is full of menace. Even those characters who don't have Foreboding feel like something terrible is about to happen—those with Foreboding feel it more intensely.

The PCs may try to catch a few hours of sleep (it's about 2300 hours by the time they reach the

clearing). Their sleep is haunted by nightmares, if they can sleep at all. Those who don't sleep may be tempted to leave the camp.

If one of the PCs decides to snoop around bit or answer a call of nature, a panther-form (a Moreau creature) leaps from a nearby tree branch. A successful Average Observation or Foreboding skill roll warns the PC before the attack, allowing him to try to avoid the creature's leap. Two combat phases after the panther-thing attacks, a lizard-thing scuttles from behind some undergrowth and joins the party. Roll 1D6 for each creature. On a 4-6, the creatures attack each other instead of the adventurer, fighting over the food! Awake PCs can hear the scuffle and respond immediately, running out to help. If they take more than one turn to knock out or kill the creatures, Rockard arrives and practically breaks the pair in half with heavy hammerblows. He then returns to his sleep.

If the PCs want to do some reconnaissance or go hunting, they can easily find their way to the installation with the maps the general provided. It's only three kilometers away, an hour's walk in the dark and unfamiliar terrain. The area houses a collection of dingy buildings, slowly crumbling under the assault of tropical conditions, and sagging fences. There are no lights, no movement, no sound—but the adventurers know something watches, waiting for victims to move into its traps. Everyone who looks at the base buildings is spooked by the utter certainty that they're being eyeballed right back.

If some foolhardy PC wants to test the defenses, he can approach without incident—until he reaches the fence. Then, he suddenly feels weak and dizzy. Roll 1D6. If the result is greater than Con+2, the PC is unconscious. If the result is less than his

Con+2, the PC stumbles to the ground, but can crawl away. If he doesn't get four meters from the fence by the beginning of the next combat round, he must again roll against his Constitution. Other PCs may dash out and grab a fallen character, but must move swiftly!

What the PCs have encountered is a stunner field, which extends all around the base at a radius of 50 meters, emanating from the buildings. Any living being checks for unconsciousness once per combat round spent in the field.

If the PCs fire upon the base, the buildings will be unaffected—as if the fire is spent somewhere else. Firers suffer the penalties of making noise: If they fire off more than a single burst at any time during the night, the noise will attract 2D6 Moreau creatures within one minute (two combat turns).

If the PCs go hunting, they match their Tracking skills against the Moreau creatures. It's certain that they'll run into some of the creatures—the question is whether the creatures surprise the PCs or vice versa. If the adventurers roll more points below their Tracking skill than the creatures (use the most skilled adventurer; the task is Average), the adventurers find the creatures and gain surprise. If not, the creatures surprise the adventurers! One to three creatures show up, and the party's on.

RUDE AWAKENING

As the darkness begins to pale, the Moreau creatures retreat, leaving the jungle and returning to the compound—PCs watching the objective buildings see at least 50 of them slouch out of the foliage and pass through the fence gate without ill effects. They all go to building 2, entering through the doorless portal. Once the creatures are inside, the installation returns to

its lifeless state.

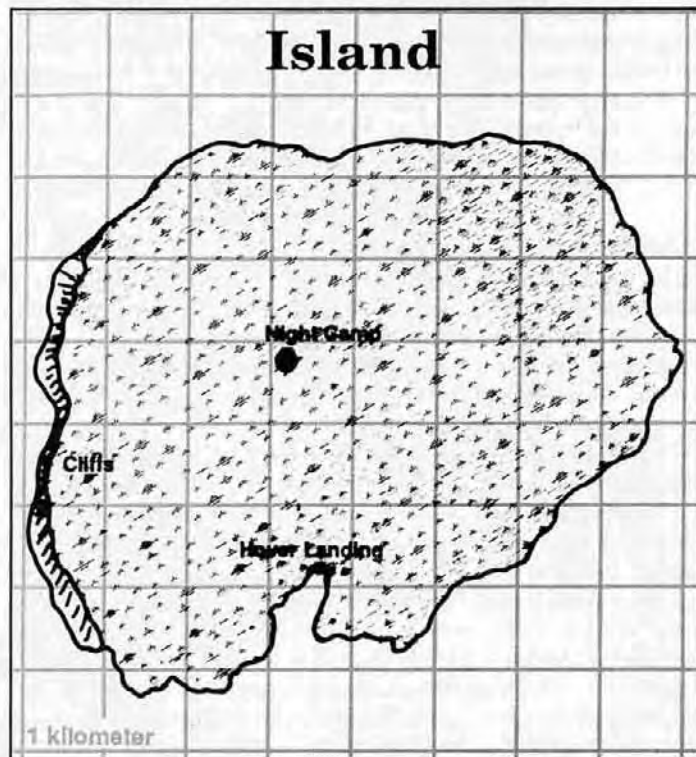
nels are stealthy—hearing or seeing them at the tunnel entrances is a Difficult Observation task. The soldiers know exactly where the PCs are and will attempt to ambush them. A successful Average Observation roll keeps the observing PCs from being ambushed. At any rate, they have a firefight on their hands.

Meanwhile, Rockard has roused the PCs in camp. He has a special job for the psychic character. "Use your powers. Look for them. Feel 'em?" The psychic can't miss—the installation radiates menace and anger like a lighthouse. "What I want you to do is fool 'em," the general says. "Jam 'em. Think of the beach. Whatever you do, keep thinking of the beach. Your thoughts'll decoy 'em to the waterfront, away from us." He's right—the psychic will quickly feel the tendrils of hate shift slightly and head toward the ocean.

The general signals to the others to follow him. Walking in starts out easy. Except for the psychic—he is under a ferocious mental bombardment and has to struggle to maintain the image of the beach. Four successful Project Thought (or EMP, whichever is higher) rolls are needed to screen the party all the way to the objective. If one of them is failed, the party comes under attack at that point (if the first roll is failed, the party only gets 25% of the way to the target; if the second roll is failed, the party only gets halfway to the target, and so on). If the failure is catastrophic, the psychic is stunned, and his powers nullified until the installation is destroyed! If the psychic fails and the party is attacked, or if the party fires off any weapons or makes any other extremely loud noises, it is attacked by single snipers.

The attackers look normal US soldiers. The first one doesn't attack as he wanders out of the foliage. He is tense and ready to fight, but he lowers his weapon slightly as the general calls to him by name. "Jacques! I thought you were a goner! Relax, men, it's one of my old command. Come on, soldier, form up! We can use the extra firepower." Psychics probing the soldier with Human Empathy will reveal the truth immediately: There's no emotion in Jacques, only an overriding impulse to kill. There is no humanity in him at all—like he's some sort of machine. And the adventurers are his targets. If no-one blasts Jacques, he fires at the psychic, taking everyone by surprise and getting off a free shot. If the PCs shoot at Jacques, they get a free shot instead. If Jacques is wounded, the adventurers will see machine pieces cyborged into him.

Another squad of soldiers shows every few minutes (every 1D6 minutes), ambushing the party—successful Difficult Observation rolls detect the soldiers before they attack. There seems to be a large supply of them. Rockard is furious. He recognizes every soldier as one of his old men, and allows no retreat, blowing up the ex-troopers—and any cover they happen to



be behind—with HEDP grenades as the party advances.

FINAL COUNTDOWN

When the adventurers reach the base perimeter, they are stymied by a pair of machinegun nests, set up in buildings 2 and 4, which fire as soon as the PCs reach the edge of the clearing. The stunner field is still up, restricting passage to the installation. The MG nests are really well dug in—only a die roll of 1 will hit them with a weapon. The soldiers manning the MGs are wearing level 2 armor.

While pinned down by the MG nests, with more cyborg soldiers coming up behind, the general braces himself behind a tree and barks, "Get ready to cover me! I'm gonna make a dash for it!" As he peeks around the trunk to eyeball the situation, a burst of fire hits him in the face and chest. He recoils, seemingly stunned but not badly hurt. His armor protected him from the bullets—almost. Part of his face is torn and bleeding, exposing a metallic skull beneath the skin. A single silvery eye stares out, its color contact cover hanging on the remains of the skin covering the eye socket. He glares at any PCs staring at him. "What are you staring at, soldier? Get back to your posts! I'm going in!"

The PCs have to make a decision: Do they shoot the "monster," or do they provide him with cover fire as he moves out across the perimeter? If they shoot at him, he twists and dodges, trying to avoid their fire and the MG bursts, setting off smoke grenades as he goes. If the general is critically wounded, he chokes, "I'm carrying a nuke. Get out of here—it's set to go off 10 minutes after my heart stops." This news should motivate the characters to leave with great swiftness.

If the PCs instead provide Rockard with cover fire, he charges straight into the MG nest, passing through the stunner field as if it wasn't there, until he runs right up into the nest. There is a melee of limbs and weapons, then the general moves on inside the building. A couple of minutes later, the characters' radios crackle with a message from him: "Bug out! Pull back! I've found the entrance to their lab, and I'm setting the fireball. Get away and call for the pickup!"

The PCs will have to fight their way through at least one more squad of cyborgs before they get clear of the area. A successful Average Observation skill roll allows the adventurers to ambush the cyborgs. Otherwise, the cyborgs will find them.

The helicopters arrive in the nick of time to rescue the adventurers, and they see a nuclear mushroom cloud rising from the island as they fly away. Within hours, the PCs are winging their way home, each carrying their \$9000 payment, which the captain of the freighter gives them from Rockard. The adventurers may keep all the gear the general provided—if they walked out with it, they deserve it—including the hi-tech rifles.

GENERAL ROCKARD

Strength: 12

Archery: 4

Heavy Weapons: 8

Melee Combat (Unarmed): 10

Small Arms (Pistol): 8

Small Arms (Rifle): 10

Thrown Weapon: 6

Constitution: 12

Climbing: 8

Parachute: 8

Swimming: 9

Agility: 9

Acrobatics: 5

Demolitions: 6

Stealth: 9

Intelligence: 7

Navigation: 5

Observation: 7

Stalking: 5

Tracking: 5

Motorcycle: 5

Wheeled Vehicle: 5

Heavy Vehicle: 4

Willpower: 8

Education: 5

Medical: 4

Charisma: 5

Instruction: 5

Interrogation: 6

Languages:

French 4

Spanish 3

Vietnamese 3

Leadership: 6

Luck: 4

Empathy: 2

Load: 72 kg

Unarmed Damage: 12

Initiative: 7

Cyborg Armor: 1 point on head, chest, both arms. He wears regular armor and helmet, too.

The last time he came to drive the monsters off this island, Rockard didn't get away for almost a decade. The aliens caught him and his men, and turned them into cyborgs. They underestimated his willpower—he instinctively forced his "programming" on the computer that was implanted in his head and escaped.

Back in the States, he learned that he was officially "dead" and not trusted by his old service. So he went rogue, declaring himself a free agent and dedicating himself to the destruction of "monsters." Since he has extensive contacts in militaries the world over, he has access to a great deal of expertise and equipment, as long as it's done on the sly.

The general's mind is a constant battle between the cold logic of the brain computer and the fanatic hatred of his natural emotions—the only thing the alien mind control operations did was unhinge his grasp on reality. (Snipers and special ops usually live in a partial fantasy world of their own, believing in a personal invulnerability and godlike omnipotence. It's part of the job).

As a cyborg, Rockard has a few notice-

able differences from the rest of humanity. He routinely accomplishes strength feats no human could match; he can go for days with only a half hour of sleep per day, he doesn't sweat very much; and he eats less than he would were he all flesh and bone. He tends to use a great amount of deodorant because the nano-organisms in his skin give off a sickly-sweet dead smell, like rotting flesh.

Rockard is a super-character. He'll always survive (as long as the referee wants him to), even reappearing after the nuclear explosion—he hid beneath an embankment, and his machinery protected him from the rads.

If the PCs acted like good soldiers, followed orders and generally displayed bravery, he'll keep them in mind for other missions and generally keep track of them. He's a good stock NPC to throw into high-firepower situations where the PCs need help. He hates "monsters," and will always be willing to kill them.

MOREAU CREATURES

Strength: 5

Constitution: 5

Agility: 7

Intelligence: 3

Education: 1

Charisma: 4

Empathy: 5

Initiative: 4

Move: 2/8/18/40

Skill/Dam: 5/2D6+2

Hits: 10/30

Appear: 1D6/2

Special: Project Emotion skill at level 5, Tracking at level 8.

These creatures are not humans that have been turned into animalistic life forms, but animals that have been geneered up to humanoid life forms! They are (for the most part) vicious, insanely attacking any human who doesn't smell like an alien or a cyborg.

CYBERSOLDIERS

Strength: 8

Constitution: 7

Agility: 8

Intelligence: 3

Education: 5

Charisma: 3

Empathy: 1

Initiative: 5

Move: 3/10/18/35


Skill/Dam: 7/7

Hits: 20/30

Appear: 1 or 4

Special: Small Arms and Heavy Weapons level 6, Tracking level 5. Armed with M-16A2s, kevlar jackets, nylon helmets, two HE and one smoke grenades. One-fourth are armed with an M203 GL (four HE and two smoke grenades). Each has three M16 magazines. Each has one level of armor on the torso and head.

The cybersoldiers show up in singles or squads of four, as appropriate. □



A medium-sized city in the northern steppes of Mars west of the Boreosyrtris League, Dioscuria stands at the intersection of three dead canals, surrounded only by good farmland. Were it not the center of German influence on Mars, Dioscuria would be little more than another way station on the caravan route to Cydonia.

Dioscuria is an old city. Archaeologists from the Berlin Museum have discovered remains from before the construction of canals. It was never a great power, however, and for centuries was a buffer state between the Boreosyrtris cities and the now-defunct Protonilus Empire.

The failure of the canals in the region occurred 8000 years ago but was not as catastrophic as it might have been. The local aquifers are replenished directly by the polar cap, and there is occasional snowfall during the winter. Trade shifted from canal boats to caravans, and the economy became agrarian.

Politically and economically, West-

until the young prince should reach the age of 10 Martian years (which will be in 1890).

Ssaskeen has been extremely cooperative with the Germans. An infantry regiment now occupies Fort Friedrich-Wilhelm west of the city, and the mighty gunboat *Hamburg* is based at Dioscuria. Several hundred Germans live in the city, and formal treaty has pledged the German Empire to protect Dioscuria against attack.

GOVERNMENT

Ssaskeen, acting as regent, has followed German advice and replaced the corrupt bureaucracy with an honest, efficient civil service. He gives Baron von Gruber, the German ambassador, his complete loyalty in exchange for 10,000 a year in bribes. However, in his heart he remains true to the old ways.

Under the terms of a treaty signed in 1884, German residents have their own police force and magistrate, all under the administration of the ambassador. Though the courts are technically only

DIOSCURIA

ern Dioscuria became a satellite of the Boreosyrtris League. The region became a quiet backwater, with only raids by High Martians and desert nomads to liven things up.

German influence in the region began in 1875, when the German Interplanetary Trading Company established friendly relations with Prince Hasthiith and secured landing rights. The German presence grew steadily as companies set up operations in Dioscuria.

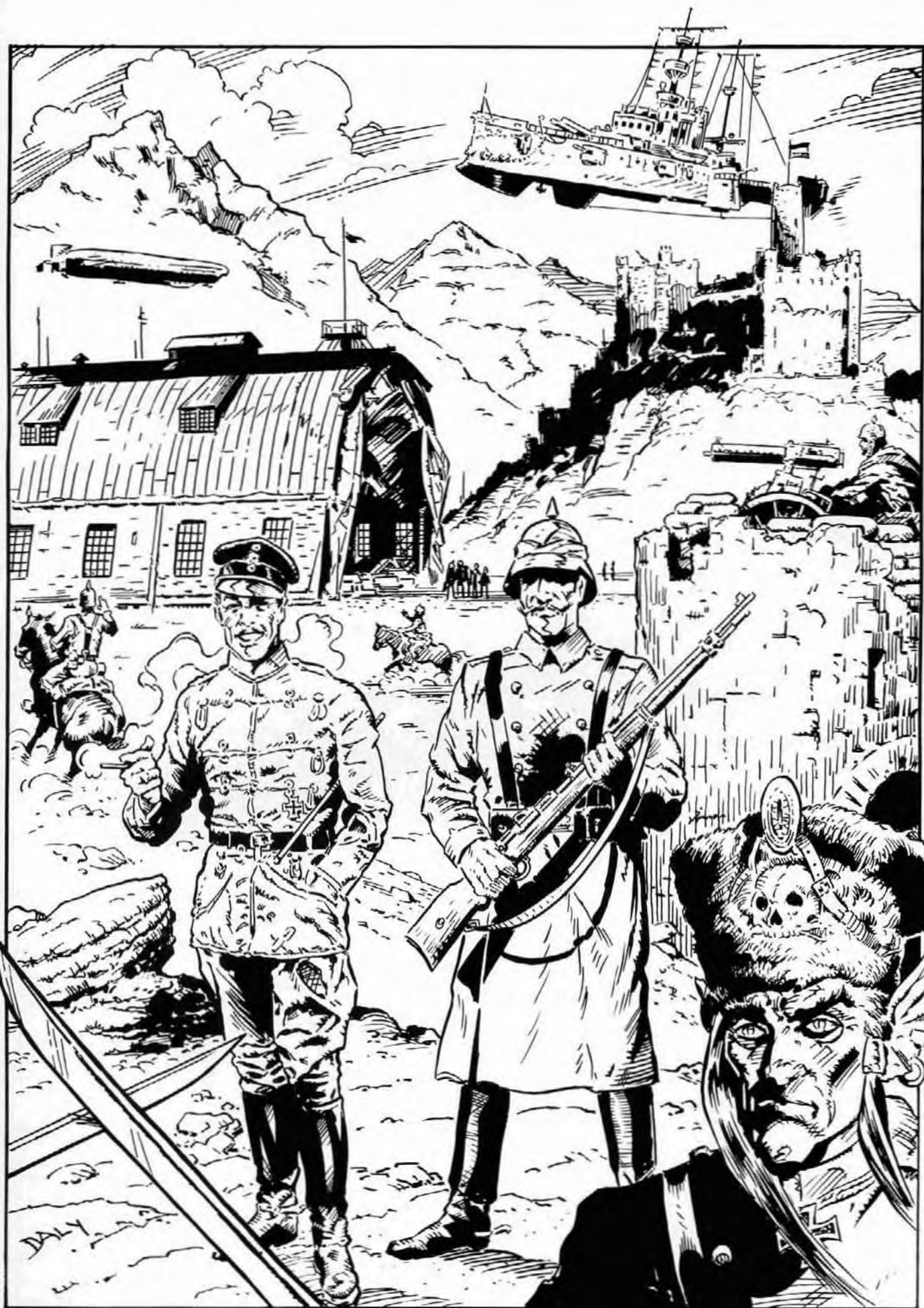
Hill Martians raids on caravans bearing German goods led Bismarck to demand that troops be allowed into the city to protect German citizens. Prince Hasthiith resisted, promising to improve his own army. He also declined to allow the Germans to base gunboats at Dioscuria and began secret negotiations with the French, hoping to offset German power.

In 1882, Hasthiith was killed in a mysterious explosion aboard the royal yacht. His successor, Prince Shskaas, was only a child at the time, so High Minister Ssaskeen was named regent

for German citizens, in practice all Earthmen fall under the jurisdiction.

The great noble landowners of Dioscuria formerly wielded great power and influence, sometimes rivaling the princes. Since the arrival of the Germans, their power has waned, due in part to the growth of trade in the local economy. Several noblemen who actively opposed the growth of German influence died under mysterious circumstances, and others have been imprisoned by Ssaskeen.

The German presence has benefited the city in many ways: Wealth and prosperity have resulted from interplanetary trade; reforms have made the government honest and efficient; and German assistance has eliminated High Martian and nomad attacks on caravans and outlying settlements. Dioscuria now dominates the surrounding cities. However, the city's foreign policy is entirely subservient to German ends, and Ssaskeen must labor to avoid giving the kaiser cause to annex the city outright.



break-through \brāk-'thrū\ *n* (1918) 1 : an act or instance of breaking through an obstruction 2 : an offensive thrust that penetrates and carries beyond a defensive line in warfare 3 : a sudden advance esp. in knowledge or technique

Summer, 1992
Gaming will *never* be the same.

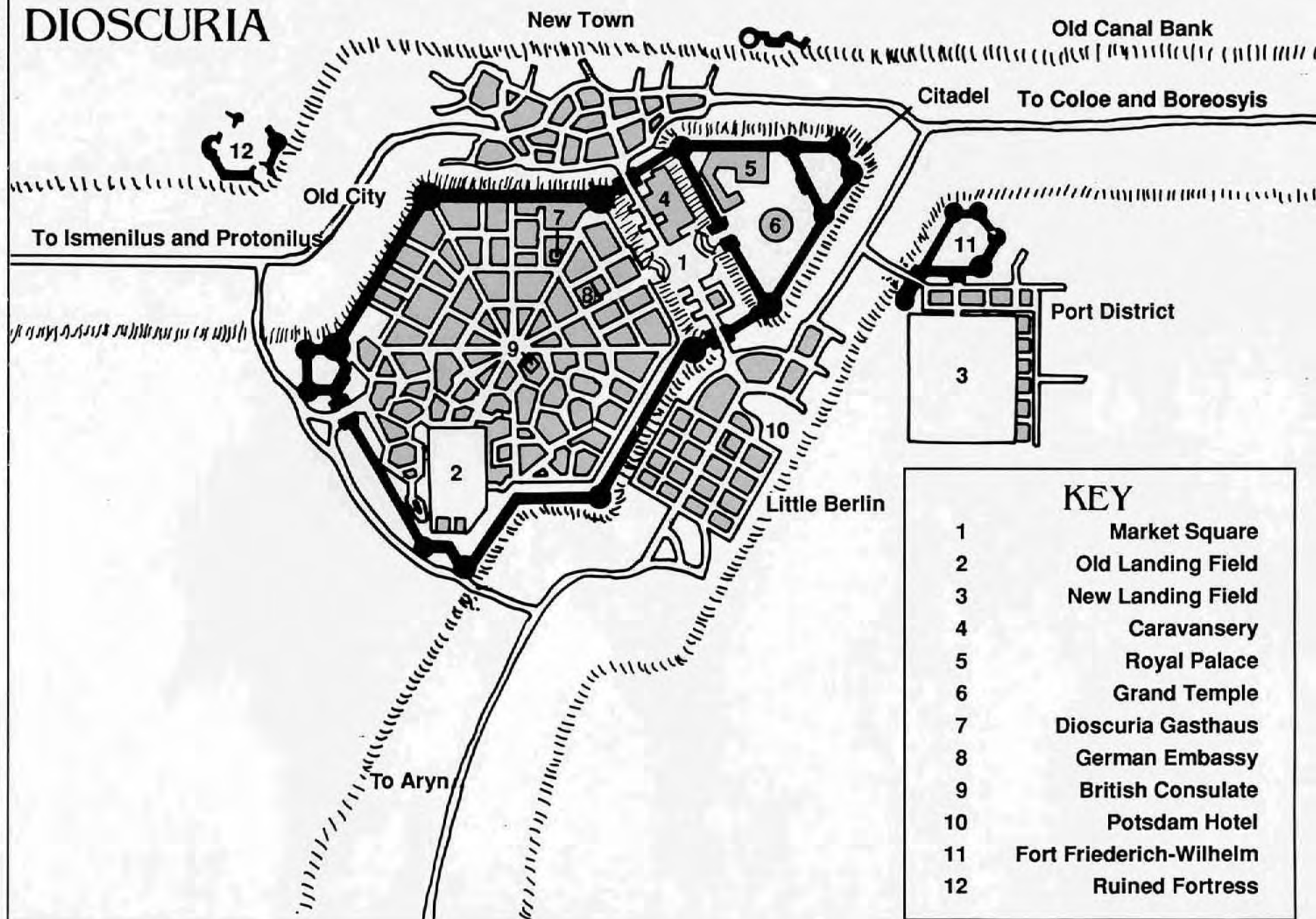


ev·o·lu·tion \ev-ə-'lū-shən, ē-və-\n (1622) : a gradual process in which something changes into a different, more complex and better form [—see **evolve** or **GDW** in 1992]

Summer, 1992
Gaming will *never* be the same.



DIOSCURIA



ARMED FORCES

Dioscuria's standing army is of poor quality. It includes 780 infantry organized into 13 bands, each with a light cannon attached. Also, 480 cavalry are formed into eight bands.

City Police: Two bands of infantry and one band of cavalry stationed in the city serve as a police force, and a third infantry band mans the city gates. Twelve heavy guns and seven Rogue guns are permanently mounted at the forts defending the city.

Cloudship Fleet: The cloudship fleet is based at the old landing field inside the city walls. It consists of eight ships—two *Whisperdeath*-class kites, three *Hullcutter*-class screw galleys, and three *Swiftwood* kites. At any given time half the ships are out on patrols.

The cloudship crews are all Trained NPCs. A single band of 60 infantry is attached to the cloudship fleet under naval command. These marines are the best of the city's regular forces—Veteran NPCs armed with modern rifles.

Admiral Hravith Shaaathan, the commander of the fleet, is loyal to Prince Shskaas and quietly opposes the Germans.

Border Posts: The remaining regular troops are deployed in the surrounding towns or in border posts.

New Model Regiment: Prince Hasthiith began organizing a regiment along European lines before his death. Ssaskeen kept it up, and accepted German assistance in equipping and training the unit. The New Model Regiment has 180 excellent-quality troops, armed with Mauser rifles and equipped with two Krupp 12-pounder field guns. The officers and men are all Martians, but their training has made them great admirers of all things German. The regiment is quartered in the citadel and guards the royal palace.

Ssaskeen's Loyal Guard: Ssaskeen maintains a fair-quality Hill Martian mercenary cavalry unit of 480 men organized into eight bands, and a poor-quality mercenary infantry force of equal size. They are paid out of Ssaskeen's own pocket (with money embezzled from the city treasury) and are loyal to him alone. The three bands of cavalry are quartered in the citadel, and the remaining mercenaries are billeted as Ssaskeen's villa a few miles outside the city.

GERMAN PRESENCE

Some 2000 German citizens live in Dioscuria. Most are merchants and their families, or employees of the Zeppelin Company. The Germans mostly live in Little Berlin, though some reside in Old City near the embassy.

The German Army has a regiment of 200 men in Dioscuria. The troops are of excellent quality, and are equipped with four Maxim guns and four 12-pounder field guns. They are billeted at Fort Friederich-Wilhelm, an abandoned fortress restored by the Germans. The regiment is commanded by Colonel Horst Vorbeck.

The powerful gunboat *Hamburg* is based at Dioscuria, as well as several smaller craft and launches for patrol work. The German Navy is under the command of Kaptenleutnant Hermann Deutsch, the captain of the *Hamburg*. He is under Vorbeck's command.

The Germans have their own police force, consisting of two dozen officers. The police patrol the Little Berlin area and are an independent civilian organization, funded partially by the ambassador.

Although there are numerous inns in Dioscuria, most European visitors patronize the two German-run hotels. The Potsdam Hotel is a new brick building with 30 rooms and hot, running water. The Dioscuria Gasthaus is an old Martian inn with 20 rooms; it has a beer garden in back and is popular with the military officers.

ECONOMY

Dioscuria is primarily a farming center. The land is fertile and well watered, producing large amounts of grain and rumetbrehr meat. Most of Dioscuria's produce is shipped overland to the Boreosyrtis cities.

The caravan trade is the second most important aspect of the economy. About once a month, a caravan departs for Coloe bearing agricultural goods, returning with manufactured products and luxury items. Once a year, the great Cydonia caravan comes through town, gathering up local products for the long trek westward. Few caravans travel south across the desert, as it is easier to transport goods to Coloe and ship them by canal.

The Germans have dramatically affected the city's economy. Dioscuria's



population has grown to 80,000 in recent years, and construction of the new landing field has increased cloudship commerce. Local merchants have prospered by serving as middlemen for the Germans, and several manufacturing ventures have been started. Ssaskeen's administrative reforms have further encouraged trade. Dioscuria is now a wealthy city and dominates the regional economy.

Food prices are low in Dioscuria, but the lack of canal transportation means that many imports are expensive. Luxuries brought in by cloudship are not overpriced, but imported bulk items are much more costly than in canalside cities. Terran goods—particularly German products—are very common and are priced only slightly higher than on Earth.

Slavery was legal in Dioscuria before the arrival of the Germans but was not essential to the local economy. Under strong pressure, Prince Hasthiith abolished slavery in 1879. However, many of the citizens, particularly the nobles, keep "indentured servants" who are slaves in all but name.

CITY DISTRICTS

The older sections of Dioscuria still huddle within the city walls on what was once a peninsula surrounded by canals on three sides. The newer sections have been built in the old canal beds.

Citadel: When the canals were full, this section was an island, holding the royal palace and the homes of nobility. When the waters dried up, it was enclosed and fortified, and now holds the royal place, the grand temple and the eastern fort. Members of the royal household (including the regent) live in the palace, and the fort is home to the New Model Regiment and Ssaskeen's mercenary cavalry.

Visitors are not allowed into the citadel without a pass. Passes can be obtained from the German ambassador, the British, Dutch or Russian consuls, the port warden or the commander of

the city police. The prince frequently invites notable foreign visitors to dine with him at the palace.

Marketplace: The market square is the hub of local commerce. It occupies the old canal bed which once separated the main city from the citadel. Two great stairways lead up to Old City and the citadel at opposite ends of the plaza. The square is always filled with a teeming raucous bazaar. Hundreds of booths hold merchants selling a variety of goods, hawking their wares at the top of their lungs. The market is a good place to buy food, local manufactures or imported luxuries, but no illegal goods are available.

Caravansary: The caravansary is a huge building next to the market square, built to accommodate caravans passing through and to serve as a warehouse for goods awaiting transport or sale. It is a vast, rambling structure with numerous forgotten nooks and chambers. The whole building smells of pack animals and spices. When a caravan is in town, the place takes on the aspect of a carnival, with merchants bartering with caravaneers, strolling entertainers and gawkers.

Old City: The main part of Dioscuria is Old City, within the walls. The northern part preserves the original street layout and is home to the city's wealthier residents. The Dioscuria Gasthaus and the German Embassy are both in that part of town. The southern half of Old

City is poorer, and in years past the streets were very dangerous at night. Improved police and a general increase in living standards have made it much safer. The British Consulate stands at the center of Old City, fronting on Ten Roads Square, and the Russian Consulate is nearby.

Landing Field: A large section of Old City is taken up by the old landing field. Once the only facility for aerial traffic, the old landing field has been largely superseded by the new German-built field. The old field still serves the Dioscurian Navy and a few Martian merchant ships, and includes the city shipyards. The yards can build Martian ships only. The four drydocks can hold of up to 1000 tons. The field is guarded by city police and customs officials, but the drydocks are patrolled by marines.

The fort at the western end of the city is home to three bands of infantry and one cavalry from the city's regular army. (Two bands of infantry and one band of cavalry stationed in the city serve as a police force, and a third infantry band mans the city gates.)

Prisoners are kept in dungeons below this fortress and the eastern fort.

Little Berlin: Built in the canal bed east of Old City, this area appears to be a modern section of Dusseldorf or Hamburg magically transported to Mars. Neat cottages of brick and wood stand amid well-tended flowerbeds on straight, well-lit, paved streets.

About 1500 people reside in Little Berlin. Most are German merchants and their dependents, but some married officers from the German regiment or the *Hamburg* have houses here, as do scientists and archaeologists from the Berlin Museum and the University of Cologne.

About 300 Terrans of other nationalities also live in the neighborhood, although the few British residents of Dioscuria prefer Old City. The Dutch consul, Jan Van Oort, maintains his office here.

New Town: In the canal bed north of the city, a new district has grown up outside the walls. New Town is home to most of the immigrants who came hoping to share in Dioscuria's new prosperity. It is a maze of unplanned, unpaved streets, lined with ramshackle buildings of mud brick and rubble. No guards or police patrol New Town, making it a center of vice and crime. The taverns never close, and all manner of illegal goods and weapons can be found here—for the right price.

A few Terrans live in New Town, mostly drunkards and criminals. It is rumored that a secret Anarchist cell meets in the neighborhood, and the Germans have occasionally sent in troops looking for revolutionaries, without success.

Port District: In contrast to the brawling, wide-open port sections of many cities, the port district of Dioscuria is as safe and proper as a Temperance Soci-

DAYTIME ENCOUNTERS

	<i>Citadel</i>	<i>Marketplace/ Caravansary</i>	<i>Old City</i>	<i>New Town</i>	<i>Little Berlin</i>	<i>Port District</i>
<i>Roll</i>	6	5	4	5	5	6
1	Guards	Guards	Guards	Beggar	Police	Soldiers
2	Guards	Beggar	Beggar	Beggar	Merchant	Merchant
3	Noble	Merchant	Noble	Thief	Official	Merchant
4	Official	Merchant	Merchant	Merchant	Ladies	Crewmembers
5	Official	Thief	Thief	Thief	Soldiers	Martian
6	German	German	German	Accident	Martian	Martian

NIGHT ENCOUNTERS

	<i>Citadel</i>	<i>Marketplace/ Caravansary</i>	<i>Old City</i>	<i>New Town</i>	<i>Little Berlin</i>	<i>Port District</i>
<i>Roll</i>	4	2	1	3	2	1
1	Guards	Guards	Guards	Thief	Police	Soldiers
2	Guards	Guards	Guards	Thief	Police	Soldiers
3	Guards	Thief	Thief	Thief	Merchant	Merchant
4	Guards	Beggar	Beggar	Beggar	Official	Crewmembers
5	Noble	Merchant	Merchant	Beggar	Soldiers	Martian
6	Noble	Accident	Accident	Merchant	Martian	Martian

ety tea party. Fort Friederich-Wilhelm stands guard over the new landing field and holds the German regiment commanded by Colonel Vorbeck. A six-inch Krupp naval gun is mounted atop one tower of the fort to protect the field against aerial attack.

The landing field is large and well-lit, with several mooring masts set up to service Zeppelin ether flyers and steam airships, but there are no drydocks to construct vessels.

A row of large warehouses lines one side of the field, and there are offices of various shipping lines and merchant companies between the landing field and the fort. There are no taverns or shops.

Underground: Dioscuria was built with the usual advanced Martian water and sewer system, but radical rebuilding was required when the canals dried up. Deep wells were dug, and the sewers were re-routed to dump wastes into huge catch basins rather than into the canals. Therefore, Dioscuria's sewer system no longer contains the lethal bacteria which make other cities' systems impassable to Martians. Fugitives, outcasts and lunatics now lurk in the tunnels beneath the city, and numerous secret entrances to the sewer system have been dug, particularly in the New Town. Abandoned basements and hidden tombs create a vast labyrinth under Old City, and local legends speak of an entire culture living underground.

A similar network exists beneath the citadel, created by the palace dungeons, the royal crypts and various secret chambers built over the centuries by the princes. The rulers of Dioscuria have tried to ensure that the entrances to the catacombs have all been found and sealed off.

Little Berlin has its own water and sewer system, installed by the Germans. There are no hidden tunnels or passages—or at least none the Germans know about.

ENCOUNTERS

To roll for an encounter, first select the proper table based on the appropriate place and time.

Next, roll for chance. The chance number follows each location name in bold type. Rolling this number or less means an encounter takes place.

Third, roll for the specific encounter. Encounter descriptions follow below.

Accident: The PCs are involved in or witness an accident. Possibilities include runaway animals, falling masonry, fires or vehicle collisions. The details are left to the referee.

Beggar: All beggars in Dioscuria are Martians.

Crewmembers: These are 1D6 Teran or Martian crewmembers from a cloudship or ether flyer. During the day they are well behaved, but at night they may be drunk and looking for a fight. Crewmen may also be German Navy personnel from the *Hamburg*, who are treated as Soldiers.

German: A German encountered in the citadel is an official. For Germans encountered elsewhere, roll on the Little Berlin Encounter Table.

Guards: A pair of city guards. In the marketplace or Old City, these are mounted half the time. During the day, guards simply make their rounds, watching for disturbances. At night, they stop and question suspicious-looking characters. In the citadel, guards encountered are soldiers of the New Model Regiment—they will arrest anyone without a pass.

Ladies: The PCs encounter a pair of German ladies going about their business, probably accompanied by a servant. Ladies never speak with strange men. Strangers bothering ladies will be treated very strictly by the police.

Martian: Martians encountered in Little Berlin should be determined by rolling on the Old City Encounter Table. Those encountered in the Port District are determined on the Marketplace Encounter Table.

Merchant: In the market, a merchant is a Martian selling things. In Old City, a merchant is a wealthy trader accompanied by his staff. In New Town, a merchant is a sleazy dealer in illegal goods. At the port or in Little Berlin, a merchant is a German trader.

Noble: A member of the royal family or one of the wealthy nobility. Nobles generally are accompanied by a swarm of guards and servants.

Official: At the port, these are mostly Martian customs inspectors. Elsewhere, they are just bureaucrats going about their business. Important officials have a retinue of assistants, with guards at night. In Little Berlin, officials encountered are German bureaucrats, either embassy staff or employees of the Zeppelin Company.



Police: The PCs encounter a German police officer, questions any suspicious persons, anyone walking the streets at night or any Martians. Police are armed with truncheons.

Soldiers: The PCs encounter 1D6 German soldiers. In Little Berlin, soldiers are officers going about their business. Around port, they are troopers on patrol acting as police. Soldiers on duty carry rifles.

Thief: All thieves in Dioscuria are Martians. During the day most are pick-pockets or purse-snatchers, relying on stealth and a quick getaway. At night they may be strong-arm robbers. Most thieves are solitary, except in New Town, where gangs of up to a dozen may be encountered at night.

PRINCE SHSKAAS

Shskaas will accede to the throne of Dioscuria in another year. He is a good-hearted person who genuinely wishes to keep his subjects happy. Though the prince is no genius, he has realized that his survival depends on cooperating with the Germans and Ssaskeen. At the same time, he hopes to find some way to offset the German influence and take control of the government himself.

He is an amiable young man and is quite charming.

Attribute	Skills
Str: 3	Fisticuffs 2, Throwing 1, Close Combat 3 (edged)
Agl: 1	Marksmanship 1 (bow)
End: 4	Wilderness Travel 4 (mapping)
Int: 2	Observation 2, Engineering 1 (earthworks)
Chr: 5	Eloquence 5, Linguistics 3 (Koline, German, English)
Soc: 6	Riding 5 (gashant), Leadership 6, Pilot 2 (cloudship)

Motives: Friendly, Proud.

Appearance: Shskaas is tall and good-looking, but has a tendency to clumsiness. He dislikes wearing the uncomfortable formal dress his position requires, and prefers peasant clothing when alone.

SSASKEEN

High Minister Ssaskeen desires only to keep his lucrative position as regent and is willing to sell the whole city to the Germans in order to do so. He has absolutely no scruples and will do anything for money. He is shrewd enough to realize that he is of value to the Germans only as long as they do not have complete control over the city, however. So Ssaskeen must constantly strive to keep the ambassador happy without giving him too much.

Attribute	Skills
Str: 1	Close Combat 2 (edged)
Agl: 4	Stealth 4, Crime 1 (forgery)
End: 2	Wilderness Travel 1 (mapping)
Int: 5	Observation 5
Chr: 3	Eloquence 3, Bargaining 3, Linguistics 3 (German, Koline, Parhooni)
Soc: 6	Riding 5 (ruumet breehr), Leadership 5

Motives: Greed, Cowardice.

Appearance: Ssaskeen is a short, slender Martian. He wears elaborate robes and fantastic amounts of jewelry, and never goes anywhere without a huge retinue of guards and servants. Ssaskeen always carries a dagger hidden under his robes.

HORST VORBECK

Colonel Vorbeck is first and foremost a soldier, loyal to his regiment and the German Army. But he is also a Bavarian patriot and resents the domination of Germany by the Prussians. He is fair and honest, and is occasionally disgusted by the underhanded methods used by von Gruber. So far Vorbeck has chosen duty over personal feelings.

Attribute	Skills
Str: 5	Fisticuffs 4, Throwing 2, Close Combat 2 (edged)
Agl: 1	Marksmanship 2 (rifle)
End: 3	Wilderness Travel 4 (Mapping), Fieldcraft 2
Int: 2	Observation 3
Chr: 6	Eloquence 5, Linguistics 2 (Dioscurian, French)
Soc: 4	Riding 3 (horse), Leadership 4, Pilot 1 (steam flyer)

Motives: Honest, Loyal.

Appearance: Vorbeck is tall and distinguished looking, with silver hair and elaborate whiskers. Because he is

slightly deaf, he speaks in a parade-ground bark, but this does not detract from his considerable personal charm. Despite his age, Vorbeck is still very strong and delights in taking on younger men in boxing matches.

GEORGE CREIGHTON

Consul George Creighton is the British consul in Dioscuria and is responsible for aiding British citizens in the city. He keeps up the facade of being careless, do-nothing British gentleman, but in fact has an astounding intelligence and will power.

Creighton is more than just a diplomat. He also gathers information for the Secret Service on German activities. He enjoys "the great game" against von Gruber and relishes the chance to use his abilities in the service of his country. Creighton is an extremely useful ally.

Attribute	Skills
Str: 1	Close Combat 1 (edged)
Agl: 3	Stealth 2, Crime 2 (forgery)
End: 2	Wilderness Travel 1 (mapping)
Int: 6	Observation 7
Chr: 5	Eloquence 5, Bargaining 2, Linguistics 5 (French, German, Dioscurian, Koline, Parhooni), Theatrics 2
Soc: 4	Riding 3 (horse)

Motives: Steady, Stubborn.

Appearance: Creighton is a small dapper man, always cool and self-possessed. He is slender and hawk-nosed, with very pale blonde hair.

VLADIMIR GRISHNAKOV

Consul Vladimir Ivanovich Grishnakov is the Russian consul in Dioscuria. Like many other Terrans on Mars, he came to the Red Planet hoping the low gravity would help a heart condition.

Grishnakov is a man of wide-ranging interests and many talents. He has travelled extensively on Earth and Mars, and views his consular appointment as sort of a permanent paid vacation. He is forever going off on mountain-climbing trips, hunting expeditions or archaeological digs. Like Creighton, he is supposed to send intelligence reports home about German activities, but he does so only sporadically. He would enthusiastically undertake any secret missions, however, if only for the excitement they would bring.

Attribute	Skills
Str: 6	Fisticuffs 5, Throwing 3, Close Combat 3 (edged)
Agl: 2	Stealth 1, Marksmanship 1 (pistol)
End: 1	Wilderness Travel 1 (mountaineering), Swimming 1
Int: 4	Observation 4, Science 1 (archaeology)
Chr: 3	Eloquence 3, Bargaining 2, Linguistics 6 (French, German, English, Dioscurian, Koline, Turkish)
Soc: 5	Riding 4 (horse), Pilot 2 (sailing vessel)

Motives: Friendly, Adventuresome.

Appearance: Grishnakov is huge bear of a man with a bushy beard and a booming laugh. He is very jolly and is an indispensable part of the Dioscurian social scene. He generally wears casual Cossack-style clothing.

HRAVIITH SHAASTHAN

Admiral Shaasthan is the commander of Dioscuria's cloudship fleet. He has served the ruling house of Dioscuria for 30 years and is extremely loyal. He distrusts the Germans and scorns Ssaskeen. He has patiently built up his fleet, training loyal officers, and now commands the most effective military force still loyal to the prince.

Attribute	Skills
Str: 3	Fisticuffs 2, Throwing 1, Trimsman 2 (cloudship), Close Combat 2 (edged)
Agl: 3	Stealth 1, Marksmanship 1 (rifle)
End: 3	Wilderness Travel 2 (mapping)
Int: 5	Gunnery (MCL) 1, Engineering 1 (naval architecture)
Chr: 3	Eloquence 2, Linguistics 3 (Koline, Parhooni, German), Bargaining 1
Soc: 5	Riding 3 (gashant), Piloting 3 (cloudship), Leadership 2

Motives: Loyal, Adventuresome.

Appearance: Shaasthan is an old, fierce-looking Martian. In his youth, he was a famous privateer (some say pirate), and he still has a buccaneering air about him. He dresses in flamboyant, casual clothing, and wears his white hair in a long mane like a Hill Martian. Ω

Don't miss "Escape from Dioscuria" by James L. Cambias in Challenge 59.

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Ghost Writer

By James L. Cambias





BOSTON—Police have “few clues” to follow in the unexplained death of Michael E. Trout, editor of *Stupefying Stories*, a popular fiction magazine. Trout was found dead in his home Thursday, the victim of severe burns. The house showed no signs of fire.

Police Captain John O'Banion was unwilling to comment on any possible connection between Trout's death and the Friday night fire which damaged the offices of Acme Publications, publisher of *Stupefying Stories*.

Trout, 43, had edited *Stupefying Stories* for six years, building the magazine's reputation for entertaining stories of adventure, “science-fiction” and horror. Acme President George D. Wilson said, “Trout was the best editor I've ever known. I'm not sure if *Stupefying Stories* will continue without him at the helm.”

Wilson declined to speculate about the fire at Acme. “The fire marshal is still gathering evidence,” he explained. “I have nothing more to say.”

Something peculiar is going on at Acme, and George Wilson, the company president, wants to know why. He is prepared to offer the PCs reasonable pay, plus expenses to find out.

Acme is located in a shabby, four-story building in Boston's Back Bay area. The bottom floor is occupied by bales of paper and bundles of magazines awaiting shipment. Minor fire damage is visible at the rear of the building, and many of the paper bales are still soaked with water. The second floor is filled with printing presses. The third floor holds the editorial offices for *Stupefying Stories*, *Thundering Western Adventures*, *Passionate Tales of Romance*, *All-Star Sports Stories* and *Two-Fisted Crime Action* magazines. The top floor holds the business offices for Acme Publications, including Wilson's office.

Wilson is a large, cynical man. He never reads his magazines and has only contempt for those who do.

“Poor Mike used to knock himself out, trying to get good pieces for SS,” Wilson tells the PCs. “The readers would ask for ‘less high-brow stuff, more blood.’

I still let him slip in a quality story every so often just so he wouldn't get depressed. I'm not even going to look for a replacement for Mike. S.S. was only breaking even anyway, and with him and three of our regular writers dead, I doubt it can keep going.”

If asked about the authors who died, Wilson can provide the following information: Dale Guthurste died about three months back—fell and broke his neck. Richard Black got food poisoning in Chicago about a week after that, and Celia Abbott was in a car accident a month ago.

If the PCs ask Wilson about the fire, he will become defensive. “I keep telling those apes in the warehouse not to throw cigarette butts around. But do they listen? A whole building full of paper, and they throw cigarettes around. And that fire marshal trying to make it look like maybe I started the fire for the insurance. If I wanted to burn the place, why did I just put in a \$2000 sprinkler system, eh? That sprinkler saved the whole building.”

STORIES

The PCs may wish to read some of the stories written by the dead authors. Of particular interest are the pieces which appeared just before each author died. Summaries of the stories are given below.

After reading the three tales, any PC making a successful Read English roll will notice that the writing style of the stories is very similar.

“Statue of Khor” by Dale Guthurste (May 1925): A man inherits a strange Egyptian statue of a horrible mouthless monster. He gradually becomes obsessed with the statue, hears voices and has strange dreams of ancient Egypt. Finally, utterly possessed by the statue, he attacks his wife with a knife. She flees and tries to topple the statue onto her husband. The statue shatters, breaking the evil spell controlling his mind.

“Feast of Blood” by Richard Black (July 1925): A young man finds a secret door in his basement leading to a hidden network of tunnels. He explores the tunnels and finds a chamber where sinister cultists are sacrificing a victim

to a huge stone image. The cultists spot the hero and pursue him through the tunnels until he emerges in a cemetery. He tells the police, but is then unable to find the door in the basement.

“Terror in the Museum” by Celia Abbott (September 1925): A beautiful young college co-ed is kidnapped by an insane archaeologist who worships an ancient idol in a museum. Just as the professor is about to sacrifice her to the statue, the girl is rescued by her fiancé. The professor kills himself, screaming that the idol must have a victim. The two students are horrified to see that the statue moves to lap up the spilled blood. The fiancé smashes the image with a fire axe.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The PCs may wish to contact the families of the three dead writers.

Richard Black: Black lived alone in a cheap apartment in Chicago. According to neighbors, he was a quiet fellow with no family who typed a lot late at night. His landlord has rented out the room but has kept Black's things in the basement. It will require a successful Fast Talk or Oratory roll (or a small bribe) for the PCs to get access to Black's stuff. An inspection of his property reveals a number of story manuscripts and drafts, but none for “Feast of Blood” except for a single, perfectly typed final draft.

Celia Abbott: Abbott lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with her mother, who is still in mourning. According to Mrs. Abbott, her daughter was killed by a hit-and-run truck driver while crossing the street. Unfortunately, Mrs. Abbott knows nothing about Celia's work. “I always thought it was a waste of time, writing those peculiar stories. I kept telling Celie to get out more often, maybe meet some nice boy.” She has already thrown out all of Celia's manuscripts.

Dale Guthurste: Guthurste lived in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, with his wife. Mrs. Guthurste will be very suspicious of anyone asking questions about her husband. Attempting Fast Talk will only make her more suspicious, but a successful Oratory roll might convince her to speak with the PCs. Mrs. Guthurste will say she is nervous because some



men came around asking questions about her husband right before he died. She knows his death was just an accident—he fell down some stairs at work—but it still makes her uneasy. All Mrs. Guthurste can recall about the men was that they were nicely dressed in black suits and drove a big black car.

If the PCs are polite and show enough interest, Mrs. Guthurste will let them see her husband's papers. Dale Guthurste apparently kept everything neatly filed. In the folder marked "Statue of Khor" the PCs will find a final draft copy of the story and a letter from Phillip H. Valecroft. The letter reads as follows:

Enclosed is the final revision of your tale, which I have retitled "Statue of Khor." I have altered your original in a number of respects, removing the more conventional eldritch elements—the living mummy, the curse, et cetera—substituting some more cosmic and original concepts in their place (in this case the idea that the evil influence of an inanimate object might cause the hero himself to attack his wife). I have also renamed the statue, as I think your suggestion of King Amen-Ra lacks a certain poetry. I believe my changes will give the story a needed freshness and ensure its publication. My fee, as agreed, is \$10.

REFEREE

Insane cultists attempting to bring an ancient statue to life have murdered the three authors and the editor of *Stupefying Stories*. The authors were murdered because they wrote stories which almost exactly described the actions of the cult. What the cultists do not know is that all three stories were actually ghost-written for their authors by Phillip Valecroft, a reclusive writer living in Arkham near the cultists' meeting place. Valecroft has been having vivid dreams depicting the cult's activities and has turned his dreams into stories, unaware of their basis in fact.

As they conduct their investigation the PCs will be approached by a young man calling himself Charles Ramsey, who claims to be an avid reader of weird fiction and a great fan of the dead writers. Ramsey will confide in the PCs that he suspects something sinister in

the recent rash of deaths and will offer to help them find the truth. If they accept his offer, Ramsey will accompany the PCs, running errands and making himself useful. If they decline his assistance, Ramsey will still tag along, friendly and cheerful, always turning up when the PCs least expect him.

Ramsey is actually an agent of the Brotherhood of Night. He hopes the PCs can lead him to whatever source is leaking information about the cult's activities.

VISITING VALECROFT

Phillip Valecroft lives alone at 66 College Street in Arkham. The neighborhood is home to a number of Miskatonic University faculty. Valecroft's house is huge and decaying, with an overgrown yard and peeling paint.

Valecroft is a confirmed recluse and tries to avoid dealing with people face-to-face. His eccentric lifestyle makes him seem very much like a sinister servant of the Great Old Ones.

If the PCs pay him a visit, he will refuse to see them, saying through a closed front door, "I'm busy right now. Send me a letter, and I'll give it my complete attention. Now please leave."

If the PCs attempt to force their way, Valecroft will flee to his study to call the police.

If the PCs keep the house under observation, they will learn that Valecroft only goes out at night, when the streets are mostly deserted. He buys groceries at a seedy all-night store and never receives any guests.

If the PCs attempt to communicate by mail or by phone, they will find Valecroft both interested and helpful—he only dislikes dealing with people in person. If the PCs can establish friendly relations with Valecroft in this manner and convince him of the importance of what is going on, he may even agree to see them in person.

The PCs may eventually get into Valecroft's house, either by invitation or by breaking in. Most of the rooms are empty—Valecroft has had to sell the furniture to supplement his tiny income as a writer. The place is poorly maintained and in need of a good cleaning. Many of the windows are broken, and

most of the upstairs rooms have leaky ceilings.

Entrance Hall: This room still has a beautiful Oriental rug and some ornate Victorian furniture. Valecroft keeps this room fairly tidy, as it is the one room which visitors might occasionally see.

Bedroom: Valecroft is using the old dining room as his bedroom. The room is filled with books piled on the floor, the chairs, even the bed. A huge steamer trunk filled with old clothes serves as Valecroft's wardrobe.

Kitchen: The kitchen is a mess. The sink is piled high with several weeks' worth of dirty dishes; the stove is encrusted with grease; and the floor is sticky. Valecroft will not willingly let anyone enter this room. A door in the corner leads to the basement stairs, but it is partially concealed by a pile of boxes filled with canned vegetables.

Basement: The basement is mostly empty. A few boxes of junk are piled against one wall. There are no secret passages or tunnels leading out of the basement.

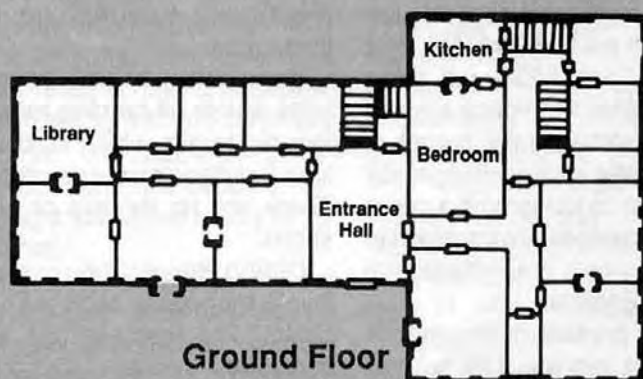
Library: This huge room is where Valecroft works. It holds the possessions most dear to him—his collection of books. Many of the volumes on the shelves are rare first editions, but they share space with cheap paperbacks and damaged books bought second-hand. Valecroft has the works of all the great horror writers (Poe, Machen, Stoker, Hearn and others). He also has numerous books on the occult, ancient history, astronomy and Massachusetts history. There are no Cthulhu Mythos books.

The library also holds Valecroft's desk, which is heaped with manuscripts and papers. The PCs can find early revisions of the stories by Abbott, Black and Guthurste, along with material by several other writers. There are also some original stories by Valecroft; his work tends to be confusing and dream-like, with vivid images but no real plots. In his typewriter is a sheet of paper bearing some typed phrases:

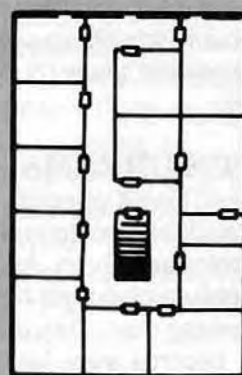
Khoorgolan walks the earth. The sky is dark and streaked with red. Arkham burns. The Miskatonic is red with blood—panicked crowds. A new God walks the earth—men and women bow



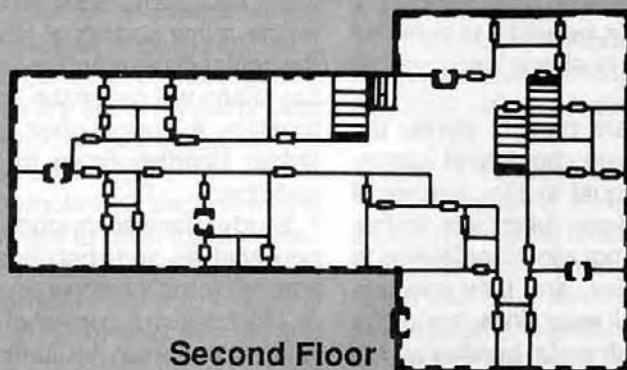
Valecroft's House



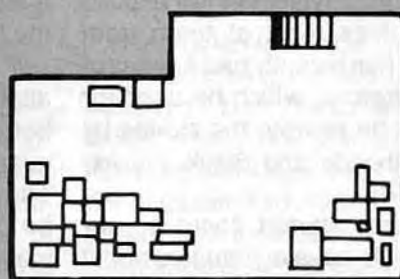
Ground Floor



Third Floor



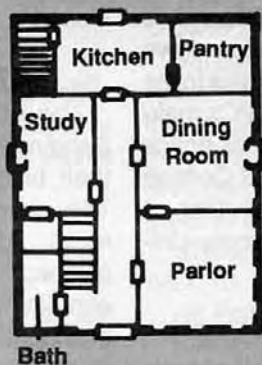
Second Floor



Basement

Sandison's House

Ground Floor



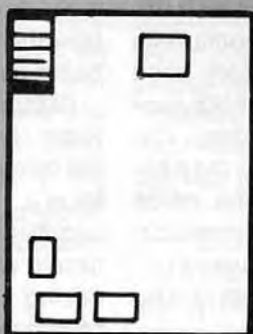
Bath

Second Floor

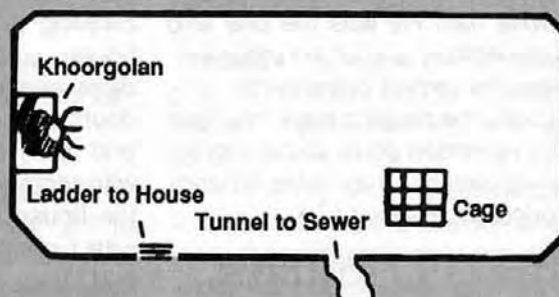


Bath

Basement



Temple Chamber





down. It feeds on blood and flesh, and breeds a horde of awful spawn. Earth cleared of life—soon it will split like a rotten fruit. Khoorgolan and all its spawn will tread the paths beyond space (?) in search of new prey.

VALECROFT'S DREAMS

If the PCs are asked to visit Valecroft, they will find him faultlessly polite and strangely old-fashioned. Even his speech sounds slightly archaic, yet he is obviously still a young man. Though reclusive, he can become very talkative.

If the PCs ask where he gets his ideas for stories, Valecroft will explain that he derives most of them from dreams. He has recently had a series of very vivid dreams, which he used for ideas when he rewrote the stories by Abbott, Guthurste and Black. He explains:

The dreams started about a year ago. I began to have nightmares about a horrible stone statue—an image with no mouth and huge, terrible eyes. Somehow I knew it was from Egypt, though it didn't look like any Egyptian statue I'd ever seen. I could tell it was infinitely evil, and when I dreamed of those eyes boring into my brain, I would wake up screaming. Then I began to see the statue in a dark room, somewhere deep underground. Robed figures were worshipping it and chanting. They were killing people and pouring their blood out over the statue. Just a few weeks ago, I began to dream that the statue moved. It would bend down and drink the blood with the tentacles on its head. Those terrible eyes would shine when it drank, and I could see that it was evil and totally insane. A man was there, leading the chant—a tall bearded man with white hair. He was the one who killed the victims, and all the other worshippers obeyed his commands.

Recently the dreams have changed again. I've written down some impressions—sometimes they come in handy for stories. (See above.)

THE CULT STRIKES

After the PCs find Valecroft, the Brotherhood of Night will attempt to eliminate him. Four cultists will break into

Valecroft's house and attack him with knives.

If the PCs are not present during the attack, Valecroft will be killed. Any PCs later making a Spot Hidden roll at the scene of the crime will notice several small pink blossoms on the carpet. A successful Botany (or Knowledge) roll will identify them as being from a crape myrtle tree. Such trees are common in the south, but they are ornamental shrubs in New England.

If Ramsey is present during the attack, he will not join the fight but will instead try to maintain his cover story. If he can slip away, he will try to summon a Fire Vampire to attack Valecroft and the PCs.

If the PCs are present during the attack, the referee should add a number of thugs equal to the number of guards, just to keep things interesting. The cultists will not allow themselves to be captured alive, and they carry no identification. All wear rings made of a strange greenish metal bearing an image of a mouthless face surrounded by tentacles (the face of Khoorgolan).

PCs making a successful Idea roll after the attack will note that any assassins killed have small pink blossoms adhering to their shoes. If Valecroft is alive, he will recall that a house down the street has some crape myrtles in the yard. If Valecroft is dead, any PCs making a successful Idea roll will notice this. The house, located at 112 College St., belongs to Dr. Peter Sandison, a noted Egyptologist at Miskatonic University.

SANDISON'S HOUSE

Sandison lives alone and spends most of his time at home when he is not teaching classes at Miskatonic. His dwelling is a modest two-story brick house, surrounded by well-kept gardens and a white picket fence. The doors and windows (even on the second floor) are locked from the inside with very strong dead-bolt locks. Inside, the house is very tidy and well-kept, with furnishings of the highest quality and taste.

When Sandison is gone or is in the temple hidden beneath his house, the dwelling is guarded by a Dimensional

Shambler, which has orders to slay anyone who does not wear a green metal ring bearing the image of Khoorgolan.

Basement: The small basement contains a new oil-burning furnace and a few old trunks which hold equipment from Sandison's last expedition to Egypt. There are no tunnels or secret passages.

Dining Room: This room contains a lovely mahogany table with matching chairs. The fireplace has a beautiful carved mantelpiece. Characters making a successful Spot Hidden roll will notice a tiny portrait of Khoorgolan in the center of the mantelpiece. Pressing the image will cause the bottom of the fireplace to swing open, revealing a ladder (leading down to the temple chamber).

Study: Sandison's study is lined with bookshelves, and a handsome oak desk stands by the windows. In one drawer of the desk are copies of *Stupefying Stories* containing the stories by Abbott, Guthurste and Black. The bookshelves hold an impressive array of tomes on Egypt and ancient history, as well as a copy of Lord Wendy-Smith's *G'harne Fragments* on loan from the Miskatonic Library's special collection.

HIDDEN TEMPLE

The underground temple is where Sandison and the other cultists make their blood sacrifices to Khoorgolan. The chamber is a large rectangular room, adorned with Egyptian hieroglyphics. At one end is a steel cage containing victims for Khoorgolan, and at the other end is the petrified god. Behind the cage is a tunnel leading to the Arkham sewer system, which is how the cultists come and go without being observed.

Cultists: When the Brotherhood of Night is not worshipping Khoorgolan, the temple is usually left empty except for one attendant who takes care of the sacrificial victims. The attendant is armed with a club and a .38 revolver. During sacrifices, a dozen cultists will be present, along with Sandison. The cultists will be armed with knives, and Sandison will have his pistol. All will fight to the death.



Victims: Four victims are locked in the cage. All are healthy young men kidnapped from New England towns by the cultists. All suffer from temporary insanity as a result of having witnessed Khoorgolan feeding. Two are catatonic; one is stupefied and babbling incoherently; and the fourth has become maniacal, raging and tugging madly at the bars of the cage.

Ritual: If the PCs enter the temple at night, they are quite likely to witness a sacrifice. The cultists will begin a droning chant that gradually becomes more and more frenetic. The victims will be brought forward from the cage and flung to the ground before Khoorgolan. Sandison will cry out a mystic phrase and slit the throat of one victim, spilling the life blood on the floor.

Then Khoorgolan will begin to move, bending forward to suck up the blood with its tentacles. Slowly, Khoorgolan will transform from a statue to a hideous living monster. Gibbering with delight, the thing will snatch up the remaining victims, draining them of blood. It may also seize a few cultists to feed upon, sucking them dry and discarding the bodies. The chanting will reach an insane peak as the cultists collapse and Khoorgolan drains 1D6 Magic Points from each of them.

Khoorgolan will remain in an active state for a few minutes, then petrify. The cultists will gradually recover and shuffle away, the ritual at an end.

DEFEATING THE MENACE

To neutralize the cult, the PCs will probably have to kill Sandison or find him put in jail. Without Sandison to lead them, the Brotherhood of Night won't make any further attacks on Valecroft (assuming he survives). It is impossible to permanently destroy Khoorgolan, but smashing the statue and scattering the fragments, or entombing it in the temple chamber would certainly prevent the Old One from causing any trouble for awhile.

PHILLIP H. VALECROFT

Valecroft is a tall man in his early thirties, very thin and pale. He dresses in threadbare, out-of-date clothing older

than he is, and affects an archaic style of speech reminiscent of the 18th century. He is very eccentric and hates to leave his house. Valecroft is fascinated by horror and the occult, but has no knowledge of the Cthulhu Mythos. If the characters are friendly and take the time to gain his trust, he will be very helpful. Threats and violence will make Valecroft uncooperative and frightened.

STR 7, CON 7, SIZ 11, INT 16, POW 7, DEX 11, APP 10, EDU 15, SAN 35.

Hit Points: 9.

Skills: Read/Write English 95%, Library Use 65%, Occult 55%, History 45%, Read/Write French 20%, Speak French 20%, Astronomy 20%, Psychology 15%, Archaeology 10%.

DR. PETER SANDISON

Dr. Sandison is a well-respected archaeologist on the faculty of Miskatonic University. Two years ago he excavated the vault holding the statue of Khoorgolan and gradually fell victim to its sinister influence. Finally, his mind snapped, and he became an insane worshipper of the ancient being. Sandison now leads the Brotherhood of Night, and Khoorgolan has taught him powerful magic and mind-twisting knowledge.

Sandison is a dignified-looking man with white hair and a beard. He dresses impeccably and now wears a strange greenish metal ring bearing the visage of Khoorgolan. He always carries a .38 pistol in his coat pocket.

STR 5, CON 8, SIZ 10, INT 17, POW 21, DEX 10, APP 8, EDU 18, SAN 0.

Hit Points: 10.

Skills: Archaeology 60%, Cthulhu Mythos 60%, History 50%, Revolver 50%, Library Use 50%, Read/Write Latin 40%, Occult 30%, Debate 25%, Anthropology 20%, Chemistry 20%.

Spells: Contact Nyarlathotep, Shriving, Voorish Sign, Contact Cthonian, Contact Khoorgolan.

CHARLES RAMSEY

Charles Ramsey is a tall, gangly young man with unruly red hair, thick glasses, and a bowtie. He always seems cheerful and eager, full of enthusiasm and helpful suggestions.

Actually, Ramsey is an insane cultist

dedicated to the destruction of life and sanity. His hair is dyed; his glasses are fake; and he carries a .22 revolver in an ankle holster.

STR 14, CON 15, SIZ 11, INT 16, POW 18, DEX 12, APP 9, EDU 10, SAN 0.

Hit Points: 13.

Skills: Fist 60%, Move Quietly 60%, Fast Talk 45%, Debate 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 40%, Library Use 40%, Hide 35%, Track 35%, Revolver 30%, Oratory 25%, Occult 20%.

Spells: Summon Fire Vampire, Bind Fire Vampire.

KHOORGOLAN (GREAT OLD ONE)

Khoorgolan is a large reptilian monster with a long tail and no arms. Its mouthless head bears a dozen tentacles, each ending in a mouth, surrounding two huge, mad eyes. When not in its petrified state, Khoorgolan is covered with a translucent reddish slime.

Khoorgolan remains petrified most of the time. It can only become active when it is given a blood sacrifice, and it then remains active for one minute for each 10 SIZ points of the sacrificial victim. While petrified, Khoorgolan cannot move and can only use its psychic attack.

STR 40, CON 40, SIZ 30, INT 20, POW 30, DEX 10.

Move: 10.

Hit Points: 35

Armor: Khoorgolan has four points of armor and cannot be impaled. It regenerates two hit point per turn, even after it is reduced to zero hit points.

Weapon	Attack%	Damage
Tail strike	50%	4D6
Kick	40%	3D6+1D10
Tentacles (6)	40%	1D6 per turn

Attacks: Khoorgolan can attack physically by kicking with a clawed foot, lashing its powerful tail or striking with up to six of its tentacles. The tentacles have sucking mouths at the ends, and a hit from one inflicts 1D6 damage. The tentacles will remain attached, doing an additional 1D6 per turn, until the victim successfully overcomes a Strength of 15 on the Resistance Table.

Spells: Khoorgolan knows all Sum-



mon and Contact spells, but cannot use them while petrified. In that form it can attack psychically, matching its Magic Points against its target's on the Resistance Table. If Khoorgolan can overcome the target's Magic Points, then the target loses 1D6 Magic Points. Khoorgolan will keep up the attack until the target loses all its Magic Points and collapses unconscious.

SAN: Seeing the statue of Khoorgolan costs 1D6 SAN on a failed Sanity roll; otherwise, it has no effect. Seeing Khoorgolan in its living state costs 5D10 SAN on a failed roll and 1D6 SAN even if the roll succeeds.

CULTISTS/ASSASSINS

Members of the Brotherhood of Night are all normal-looking people, perhaps a little glassy-eyed or degenerate. During the hideous rituals underground, they wear black, hooded robes.

STR 14, CON 12, SIZ 12, INT 8, POW 10, DEX 10, APP 9, EDU 7, SAN 0.

Hit Points: 12.

Skills: Fist 60%, Stealth 50%, Revolver 40%, Knife 40%.

DIMENSIONAL SHAMBLER

The Dimensional Shambler is a hideous creature that wanders between the universes. Its skin is loose and wrinkled, and it has huge chitinous claws.

STR 20, CON 18, SIZ 20, INT 6, POW 9, DEX 6.

Move: 7.

Hit Points: 19.

Weapon	Attack%	Damage
Claws (2)	30%	1D8+1D6
Grab	50%	None. Can carry off victim

Armor: The Dimensional Shambler has three points of armor.

Special Powers: The Dimensional Shambler knows no spells.

The creature does have the ability to travel at will to other dimensions by expending four Magic Points.

The transition to another dimension takes five rounds. During this time, the creature can act normally, except for the first round, when the Magic Points are spent.

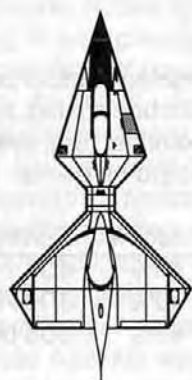
By using one extra Magic Point per 10 SIZ points of a victim, the Shambler can take others with it when it journeys to other dimensions; this accomplishment requires a successful Grab attack. Anyone carried off by the creature is gone forever.

SAN: Seeing the Dimensional Shambler costs a character 1D10 points on a failed SAN roll, and none on a successful roll. Ω

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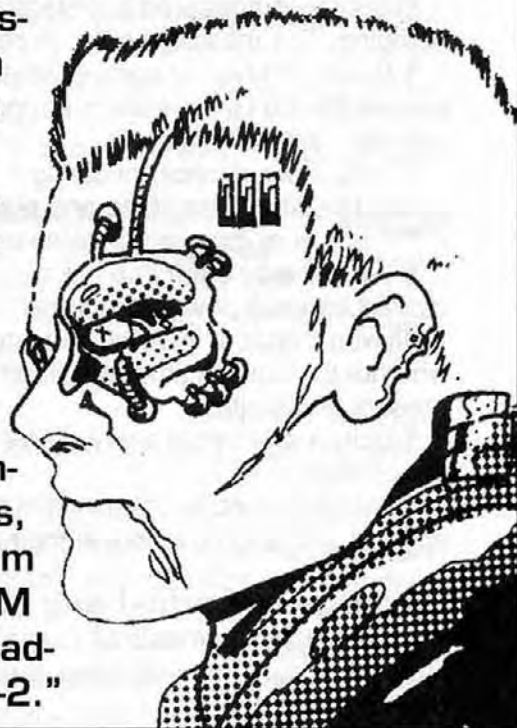
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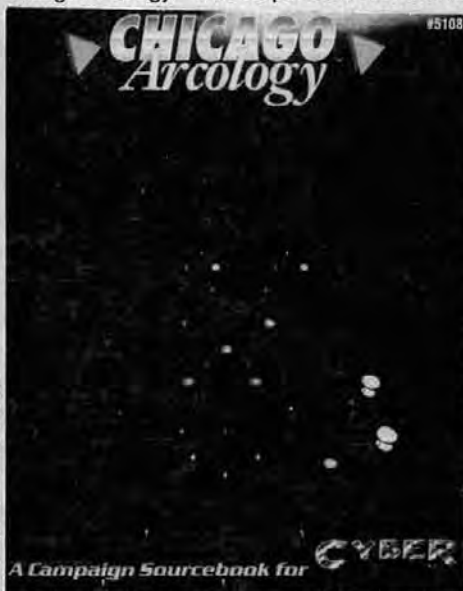
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TRAVELLER *News Service*

Regina/Spinward Marches (0310 A788899-A)

Date: 101-1123

¶Representatives of Archduke Norris Aledon announced today that the archduke is seeking to meet with leaders of the Ine Givar movement in order to settle long-standing differences between the terrorist organization and the Imperial government, now in the form of the Domain of Deneb.

¶The Ine Givar, which are known to have had ties to the Zhodani Consulate, were heavily involved in the buildup to the Fifth Frontier War in 1105-1107, particularly on Efate and Ruie in the Regina subsector. Since the end of that war, Ine Givar activities have been almost nonexistent, although it is clear that the organization still exists, according to official Domain sources.

¶There has been much public concern of late that the Ine Givar will take advantage of the increasing isolation of Deneb from the embattled Imperial Core and strike unexpected and telling blows, perhaps in conjunction with Vargr, Aslan or Zhodani strike units.

¶The offices of the archduke have announced that such concerns are "fantastic and alarmist," and that the suggested negotiations are intended to further stabilize the position of the domain until such time as full contact with the reunited Imperial interior can be resumed.

Regina/Spinward Marches (0310 A788899-A)

Date: 116-1123

¶An explosion ripped through a public shopping mall this morning near the ducal compound, killing or critically wounding several score of volunteer workers setting up for a charity fund-raising event.

¶Messages appeared in several public databases two hours later, announcing Ine Givar responsibility for the bombing. The message read, in part:

¶"Duke [sic] Norris' wish to enter into negotiations is only a cynical and transparent attempt to identify and expose the Ine Givar leadership, in order to allow their assassination by the Imperial security apparatus. We will not allow this to happen.

¶"This show of force, involving no loss of life, was designed to show the duke [sic] how vulnerable he is to our power to strike at any time and place of our choosing.

¶"It is a very dangerous game he is playing.

¶"We will only enter into talks that sincerely seek to redress our just grievances against the corrupt and out-moded Imperial power structure."

¶It would appear from the text that the explosion was not intended to cause casualties, although it is not known whether the bomb's timer was faulty or if the Ine Givar terrorists were simply unaware that volunteers would be present at the site.

¶Archduke Norris is away at Mora. However, members of the ducal household characterized the bombing as "an outrage."

¶One person noted, "This claim that there would be 'no loss of life' proves how callous and bloodthirsty those animals are, and how hollow their claims for justice."

Larmige/Dagudashaag (2709 X7759DD-C)

Date: 124-1123

¶Rear-guard elements of Lucan's naval forces conducted a thorough orbital bombardment of all Larmige's starport, scout and naval base assets starting last night and continuing on through this morning, with appalling civilian casualties.

¶This news service regrets to report the absolute annihilation of all port, landing, shipyard and base facilities on Larmige effective this date.

¶This in a brutal and unanticipated act of betrayal is unprecedented, as the people of Larmige have faithfully supported Lucan's military operations since 1117. For six years, its shipyards have repaired and serviced Lucan's fleets.

¶Yet today, rather than being taken by enemy forces, rather than being left to defend itself, rather than being given protection commensurate with its sacrifices, it has been blotted from existence as a starfaring world by the very forces that it has served so ably and unselfishly.

¶The shock and grief of the population can best be summed up by a man who was observed earlier today stumbling through the ruins of the starport, searching through the bodies of those who had been working in the starport, unaware of what was about to befall them.

¶Dressed in ragged clothes and covered with blood and soot, he repeated over and over, "What did we do wrong? What did we do wrong? Can you tell me—what did we do wrong?"

Esalin/Spinward Marches (1004 C565673-8)

Date: 136-1123

¶A plot to assassinate the Archduke Norris has been reported through established channels by envoys from the Zhodani Consulate to Domain of Deneb authorities.

¶While the plot was discovered within the Zhodani borders, it is not yet clear if the plot involves Zhodani nationals, Imperial nationals or third parties.

¶Zhodani information indicated that the operation may be already underway, as several objects of the investigation are missing.

¶In order to speed the passage of this information to Deneb authorities who may be able to contain the operation, this information is also being routed through Farreach (1402 Spinward Marches) and Querion (1614 Spinward Marches).

¶A Zhodani offer of assistance in the apprehension of the assassins has thus far been declined.

¶Insiders are speculating whether this development could be at all related to the unusual Zhodani naval activities of 1119 or to the increased talk of Ine Givar activity within the Spinward Marches.

Depot/Dagudashaag (3121 A310244-D)

Date: 161-1123

¶This report has been delayed by Imperial Navy censors until arrival at Depot.

¶Some minor changes may have been made from the original report for purposes of clarity, but these do not affect its content.

¶The story of the elimination of militarily useful basing facilities at Larmige (2709 Dagudashaag) has become clearer in the days since the event.

¶Previously the site of a naval base, scout base and starport rated at level B, Larmige was one of the crucial bases in the Imperial perimeter through Dagudashaag sector, along the main line of opposition to the forces of the usurper, Dulinor, and the imposter, Strephon.

¶It had been in the front line of the fighting since 1117 and for six years had serviced Imperial forces in these main areas.

¶However, due to operational, strategic and logistical considerations, it was necessary to adjust the Imperial lines through Dagudashaag sector to a new position anchored on Iiradli (3008 Dagudashaag).

¶This should not be seen as a withdrawal. Rather, the new lines are much stronger than the exposed and dangerous position of Larmige.

¶Given this redeployment, and the certainty that Dulinor's forces would have taken advantage of Larmige's fine facilities to launch attacks to further threaten Imperial citizens, the Larmige base clearly, though regrettably, had to be destroyed.

¶Fortunately, Imperial Intelligence assets have been able to ascertain without doubt that Larmigen casualties during this carefully controlled demolition were, in fact, quite negligible.

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 213-1123

¶Professor Ililek Kuligaan has disappeared following his controversial remarks yesterday at Dlan University in which he called the Rebellion a "ridiculous war," among other things.

¶Kuligaan was until today until today holder of the Dulinor Astrin Ilethian chair as chairman of the Department of Imperial History. At public forum, The Future of an Imperium in Conflict, part of the university's regular series of public fora, Kuligaan made his comments in answer to a question about rumors that Lucan was concentrating efforts on a secret weapon to bring the six-year-old rebellion to a conclusion.

¶"If he's not," Kuligaan said, "he should be because that's the only way anyone will win this ridiculous war. Anyone could have foreseen that the Imperium would split into factions of such equal size that no one would be able to gain the upper hand. All that we have been able to accomplish in six years of civil war—and I mean civil war, if you must call it a "rebellion," then call it a rebellion against common sense—is the slaughter, no, the murder of tens of billions of loyal Imperial subjects. And what was their crime? That they could only be loyal to one emperor at a time, not six or seven."

¶The casualties quoted by Kuligaan are those presented by the university, based on figures provided by naval intelligence. They include deaths caused by disease, starvation and piracy resulting from the succession struggle, as well as immediate combat fatalities. Although these numbers have not been disputed, they were not widely disseminated because of their probable effect on public morale.

¶Emperor Dulinor's office issued a warrant for Kuligaan's arrest this morning and stripped him of his office at the university. But Kuligaan has disappeared, lending credence to rumors that he had prepared these remarks in advance, along with a means of escape.

¶When asked for comment on the arrest warrant, Dlan University Chancellor for Academic Affairs Justin Horrocks replied, "Well, we all know it's illegal to arrest a professor for a public statement of political analysis. It must be parking violations." Ω



Gamers often plague referees with questions like, "How good is expertise level 2?" or "What skill level should I take in Combat Rifle?"

And when PCs encounter a new NPC, they may need to know his expertise in a particular skill.

Some referees prefer to stick to the stats for character descriptions, while others introduce characters through information-gathering tasks rather than through data alone.

No matter what method is used, the referee may want to offer players something beyond the raw numbers. He needs information that will tie a specific expertise level to the PC's life or to something the player is familiar with.

The information below provides a common ground for 2300 AD referees and players, defining the various lev-

Just How Good is Sidearm-5, Anyway?

Skill Levels in 2300 AD

By Andy Slack

els of expertise. These descriptions are easy to use in other game systems if the skill level is changed to reflect the appropriate chance of success. The percentage chances of success for each skill level are listed for that purpose.

UNSKILLED

The character has no expertise worth mentioning in the skill.

LEVEL 0: GREEN

The character has a 50% chance of success at Routine tasks and a 10% chance

of success at Difficult tasks. An NPC with this skill level might be young and inexperienced. Or (more dangerously) he might be a former user of the skill who has been out of touch with it for so long that his knowledge is obsolete but who still thinks he knows what to do.

The character might have academic knowledge of the skill (e.g., a college course), but very limited practical experience, and he might never have used the skill in a position of responsibility. For a nonacademic skill, the character might have had equivalent instruction from someone with expertise level 2 or more in the skill concerned.

Alternatively, the character could have gained a working knowledge of the skill by supervising others with expertise level 2 or more.

LEVEL 1: EXPERIENCED

The character has a 60%

chance of success at Routine tasks and a 20% chance of success at Difficult tasks. The average NPC encountered will have this level of expertise in those skills he uses to make his living; his immediate supervisor (team leader, sergeant/corporal or whatever) is likely to have expertise level 2.

The character has had at least six to 12 months of practical experience in using the skill within the last 10 years. This might have been as part of a team working on some project that required the skill or carrying out an in-depth study for a company. Alternatively, the character might have used the skill in his hobbies (in this case, expertise level 1 usually indicates some significant output like a published paper, practical model or patent).

LEVEL 2: VETERAN

The character has a 70% chance of success at Routine tasks and a 30% chance of success at Difficult tasks. NPCs in positions of responsibility will usually have this level of expertise and will be in charge of several NPCs with expertise level 1.

The character has a lot of practical experience in using the skill and has held a position of responsibility based on his expertise (e.g., leading a team of skilled people). He has produced something tangible by which the quality of his work can be judged (reports, software, machinery built from scratch, etc.), and those hiring him may be able to examine this product to satisfy themselves of his skill.

He also has sufficient knowledge of skills related to his main speciality to use those skills, but he still needs help or supervision in those areas even for tasks that one

person could undertake alone. In 2300 AD terms, he will have expertise level 1 in related skills.

LEVEL 3: ELITE

The character has an 80% chance of success at Routine tasks and a 40% chance of success at Difficult tasks. This is the highest level of skill a randomly encountered NPC might possess.

The character has reached such a level of expertise in his chosen field that others seek his advice and willingly accept it. He fully understands the skill concerned and can explain it to others, including the practical limits of what can be done.

Also, the character has a good knowledge of skills and subject areas related to his primary skill. Depending on the task in hand, he might be able to operate entirely alone, with neither assistance nor supervision in those related areas. In 2300 AD, this translates to expertise level 2 in related skills.

At this level of expertise and above, the character will happily supervise others using the skill concerned, but begins to dislike being supervised himself because he knows perfectly well what to do.

LEVELS 4-7: EXPERT

The character only fails Routine tasks when he fumbles. He has a 50% or better chance of success at Difficult tasks and can succeed at Formidable tasks beyond the reach of others. NPCs at this level of competence are not encountered randomly: They will be sought out by the players or individually created by the referee for a particular purpose.

The character has successfully completed projects

in which his skill was a vital factor. Whatever he built or wrote has been working satisfactorily for one or two years since it was delivered, and the project may well be known by reputation to anyone who considers hiring the character.

The character spends a fair amount of time improving and strengthening his knowledge of his chosen subject (practicing, attending seminars, reading trade journals, etc.) He is an acknowledged expert in his field and has probably published papers on his speciality, written books about it or appeared on television.

LEVELS 8-10: GENIUS


The character only fails at Difficult tasks when he fumbles. He has a 50% or better chance of success at Formidable tasks, and can sometimes succeed at tasks most practitioners of his skill

would call Impossible. NPCs with this level of skill are extremely rare and are not usually for hire.

Characters with this level of expertise are normally famous names, known by reputation to almost everyone who uses the skill concerned. They have met most of the other people with equivalent levels of skill (at conferences or whatever) and probably know a number of them personally.

Referees may elect to award a renown point to any player character who reaches this sort of skill level, and might want to develop non-player character contacts of equivalent expertise (friends or rivals).

The differences between these extremely high levels of expertise can only be detected and appreciated by other experts; most people can only tell that these people are very good at what they do. Ω



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Streets on Fire

Megacombat in *Shadowrun*

By Thomas M. Kane



It ain't the lone wolf that brings down the prey. It's the pack. And if you're goin' up for a rumble, your gonna want all the numbers you can get, 'cause you can bet the opposition ain't gonna hesitate to gang up on you. You gotta get there the firstest with the mostest and do it the fastest without bogging down in all the detailed drek. Like the wise man says, chummer, "The best strategy is to be very strong."

A *Shadowrun* referee needs a way of resolving big fights fast—whether the Salish Ranger Force is evicting an Aztechnology outpost from Indian land or the Seattle Ancients are rumbling with the Blood Highway Trolls. *DMZ* offers streamlined rules for combat, but at the man-to-man level, and it is an entire game in itself, only partially compatible with *Shadowrun*. These rules group large numbers of *Shadowrun* fighters into units and resolve all their attacks with a single roll of the dice. In this way, a referee can adjudicate the details of huge fights quickly, returning the focus of attention to the shadowrunners themselves.

To prepare for a mass battle, a referee organizes the opposing sides into units. These can represent organized military formations or simply collections of fighters who intend to do roughly the same thing. A unit may even be a fortress, a single large vehicle or a big critter such as a dragon.

Each unit must have a PC or NPC commander to choose its actions in combat. This character will make rolls for Leadership and Military Theory (Tactics). For these purposes only, Leadership defaults to Charisma with a +2 penalty to target numbers and a -2 penalty to Initiative rolls. Tactics defaults to Intelligence with a +2 penalty to all target numbers.

These default penalties do not follow

the usual skill web rules. However, they present a more accurate picture of the typical shadowrunner's abilities. Few archetypes have tactical skills recorded because these usually depend, not on the character, but on the player. In order to give PCs an active roll in mass combat, one can assume that they acquired some knowledge of tactics and leadership in the day-to-day business of shadowrunning.

Every unit has four basic statistics: morale, offense, defense and magic defense. Calculate these attributes as follows.

Morale: Morale represents a unit's loyalty, bravery and ability to fight as a team. Since this figure serves as a target number for the commander's Leadership rolls, the lower the morale score, the better the unit. The referee may assign morale based on personal preference or on the following guidelines:

Unit	Morale
Mob	9
Street gang	8
Mercenary squad	7
Fanatics	6
Regular troops/police	5
Elite unit	4
Trained fanatics	3

When designing units, the referee may use average values or simply overlook minor quibbles. For example, if a crowd storms in the Aztechnology building, you can simply assume that everyone in the mob has the statistics of the pedestrian contact and wields a club. Some of those present probably have the statistics of corporate wage slaves and wield Streetline Specials—the referee may ignore such details.

If a unit contains several distinct components, each of which seems important, the referee can do one of two things. He can break the unit down into smaller units, or he can calculate the statistics for each component and average them together. The latter method involves more mathematics in the preparation stage. However, it reduces the number of units in play, thereby greatly shortening the length of time required to resolve the battle.

Offense: The offense value is a factor combining the different statistics of weapons and combat skills. Calculate each unit's offense value using the most com-

mon weapon in the unit and the average weapon skill for unit members. If a unit uses two major weapons, you may wish to determine two offense skills.

Convert weapon damage categories to a numerical value as follows: L=1, M=2, S=3 and D=4.

Offense equals weapon power level plus (character's skill rating divided by staging) plus (weapon damage category times staging):

$$\text{Offense} = \text{Power} + (\text{Skill} \div \text{Staging}) + (\text{Damage} \times \text{Staging})$$

Weapons capable of autofire gain an additional +1 to offense. Round uneven numbers down.

For example, a unit consists of street samurai archetypes (Firearms 5) armed with Ares Silvergun pistols (2M3 damage). Applying the formula, $2 + (5 \div 3) + (2 \times 3) = 9$. The unit has an Offense Value of 9.

Defense: A unit's defense value equals armor rating plus average body rating plus average Quickness rating:

$$\text{Defense} = \text{Armor} + \text{Body} + \text{Quickness}$$

A unit may need two defense ratings—one for ballistic attacks and one for impact attacks.

Magical Defense: The magical defense value is the average Willpower score of a unit.

HOW TO PLAY

Keep track of unit damage using the usual damage monitor, with its 10 spaces and four categories of wound. Damage has the usual effects of causing penalties to attack rolls and Initiative. For example, a unit with light damage suffers a +1 penalty to all its attacks and -1 to all Initiative rolls.

Mass combat uses the same turn sequence as the ordinary game. Each side rolls Initiative. Then units and individuals take turns performing actions, beginning with whoever has the highest Initiative and proceeding to the next highest, etc. Individuals acting alone use the same rules as always. However, in mass combat, an action can involve a whole unit, with any number of individual fighters. Units resolve Initiative and combat in slightly modified ways.

Initiative

Each unit determines Initiative by rolling 1D6 and adding the commander's Leadership rating. Wired reflexes, etc. do not apply to Initiative in mass combat. This roll simulates, not the reaction time

of individual fighters, but the speed with which a leader can get numerous troops to cooperate on the same action.

Actions

A unit can perform any of the following actions: move, force move, rally and attack.

Move: Movement requires little effort to resolve. A unit moves at the Quickness rating of its slowest member, in meters. For example, a squad of 10 Troll street samurai archetypes (Quickness 7) could move at seven meters per action. Units may combine movement with an attack, just like individuals. They suffer the normal +1 penalty to the attack target number for movement.

Force Move: A forced movement is the unit equivalent of a run. Unfortunately, when whole units run, they risk losing their cohesion. A unit performing forced movement may move at three times its normal movement rate. The aforementioned Troll samurais could force move at 21 meters per turn. Furthermore, the commander of a unit making a force move must attempt a Leadership test with a target number equal to the unit's morale. If this test fails, the unit suffers a light wound.

Rally: Damage to a unit indicates loss of morale and cohesion as much as actual wounds. Therefore, a damaged unit can often recover its strength by taking time to rally. This requires a complete action in which the unit neither moves nor fires. The unit's commander must make a Leadership roll with a target number equal to the unit's morale. All wound penalties apply to this roll. Success reduces the damage by one wound category.

For example, a street gang (base morale of eight) has six blocks filled in (a serious wound). The commander has a target number of 11 to lead a rally (morale of eight plus a wound modifier of three.) If he scores one success, the wound becomes moderate.

A unit which suffers a deadly wound cannot rally.

Attack: When a unit attacks, its commander attempts a Military Theory (Tactics) success test. This roll determines how effectively commanders can use the many individual fighters under their command. One derives the base target number using the offense value of the attacking unit and the defense value of the defenders.

Modify offense and defense scores by all modifiers which would affect individual attacks under the given conditions. For example, a unit under partial cover gains two points to its defense score. A unit which every member has a smartgun link could add its offense statistic. Units using missile weapons must subtract a modifier to reflect range:

Range	Penalty
Short	None
Medium	-1
Long	-3
Extreme	-5

After applying all modifiers, subtract the defender's defense statistic from the attacker's offense. Then consult the table below to determine attack target numbers.

Offense-Defense Differential	Target Number
-5 and below	11
-4	10
-3	9
-2	8
-1	7
0	4
1	3
2	2
3	2
4	2

For every differential point above 2, an attacker gains one automatic success in addition to any other successes he rolls. For example, an attacker with an offense of 17 attacks victims with a defense of 11. This results in a differential of +6. The attacker rolls his normal Tactics dice and also gain four automatic successes (6-2).

Damage to Units

Attacks in mass combat cause a base of light damage. The attacker may bump up as usual, using a staging number determined by the table below. Note that the victim cannot bump damage down (although it may rally on later turns). Therefore, no power level applies.

The staging number in mass combat reflects sheer manpower. To determine the staging number for damage in mass combat, divide the number of people in the attacking unit by the number of defenders to determine a ratio. Round uneven numbers to favor the defender. Then consult the following table.

Ratio	Staging Number
1:5	20
1:4	16
1:3	12
1:2	8
1:1	4
2:1	2
3:1	1
4:1	1
5:1 and better	0.5

For every "odds column" below 1:5, add four to the staging number. For example, an attack at 1:10 has a staging number of 40.

Damage to Individuals

When PCs or other important people belong to a unit that takes damage, they may suffer wounds as well. Each must attempt a quickness roll, with the target number shown on the table below. If the number rolled is equal to or lower than the number shown, that person suffers a wound of the type indicated. The victim may attempt to reduce this damage with armor and a body roll as usual.

Characters roll on this table each time their unit takes damage. Note, however, that the unit damage column shows the damage inflicted in the last attack, not the total damage inflicted. For example, if a unit has nine blocks filled and suffers a light wound, it disintegrates. However, PCs within the unit need only escape the effects of a light wound.

Unit	Quickness	
Damage	Target Number	Wound
Light	5	3D3
Moderate	7	4D4
Serious	9	5D5
Deadly	11	6D6

Unless a commander is a PC, the referee need not roll to determine the commander's wounds in each attack. The chance of killing a commander with a lucky shot is factored into the combat system.

Area-Effect Weapons

These rules assume that each side uses hand grenades, shotguns, guns capable of autofire and other minor area-effect weapons. But magic and heavy artillery allow area damage on a far greater scale—these weapons halve the staging number in an attack.

Weapons eligible for area-effect bo-

nuses include missiles, autocannons, weapons firing shells of over 40 millimeters in diameter and any automatic weapons which normally fire over five shots per action. The presence of even one area-effect weapon within a unit qualifies it for the area-effect bonus.

Heightened Reflexes

A unit may also be entitled to a bonus in combat if its members move significantly faster than ordinary human beings. Units may halve their staging number if either of the following conditions apply.

- All members have wired reflexes, boosted reflexes level two or the equivalent.
- At least 10% of a unit has wired reflexes or the equivalent at level three or higher (possible through magic).

Magic

Just as these rules do not account for each individual bullet, they also do not account for each individual manaball. However, magicians can have a profound influence on the battle. In each action, each magician may divide the dice from his magic pool among the following activities.

Attack: The magician may raise the offense value of any one visible unit. The unit receives a number of offense points equal to the number of dice the magician allots minus the magic defense of the opponent. Any receiving offensive help from a magician may halve its staging number, due to the effects of area-effect spells.

Defense: The magician may add to the defense value of any one visible unit. The unit gains one defense point per die allotted to it.

Magic Defense: The magician may add to the magic defense of all visible units. Every die allotted increases the units' magic defense by one.

Magicians may use elementals and spirits for these strategies as well. A summoned creature can perform any of the three tasks listed above, adding points equal to its force level. Each different task requires one service.

Units vs. Individuals

Not everybody on the battlefield belongs to a unit. PCs in particular are apt to wander off and fight private wars. Most of the time, the referee can resolve

these situations using the ordinary rules. For example, if a team of PCs attacks a unit in the heat of combat, the referee can simply detach a suitable number of archetypes from the unit and resolve the battle. As long as the unit has other enemy units to worry about, the party should not have to fight more than two or three times its own number.

A team of shadowrunners can inflict damage to a unit completely out of proportion to the team's numbers. The simple presence of a subbattle inside a unit has the effects of a light wound. Furthermore, the party can inflict permanent damage on a unit by destroying its commander or members, as shown below. Units may not reduce this damage by rallying.

For damage to units by individuals, see the table below.

<i>Members</i>	<i>Wound Category</i>
10%	Light
30%	Moderate
50%	Serious
90%	Deadly
Commander killed	Deadly

If, for whatever reason, the PCs go where an entire unit of otherwise unoccupied enemies can shoot at them, com-

pute their defense values and resolve combat using the system here. Each PC suffers whatever damage a unit might have suffered. Note that, like units, the PCs cannot bump this damage down. Also note the low staging numbers the attackers are likely to enjoy.

The final effect of these rules should be to make mass combat as simple or as complex as the referee desires. A referee can make player characters commanders of forces and play out long tactical battles, or he can lump whole gangs into single units and settle battles with one die roll. That means the party can find itself in the middle

of a war at any time. It's the *Shadowrun* way of life, chummer. Ω

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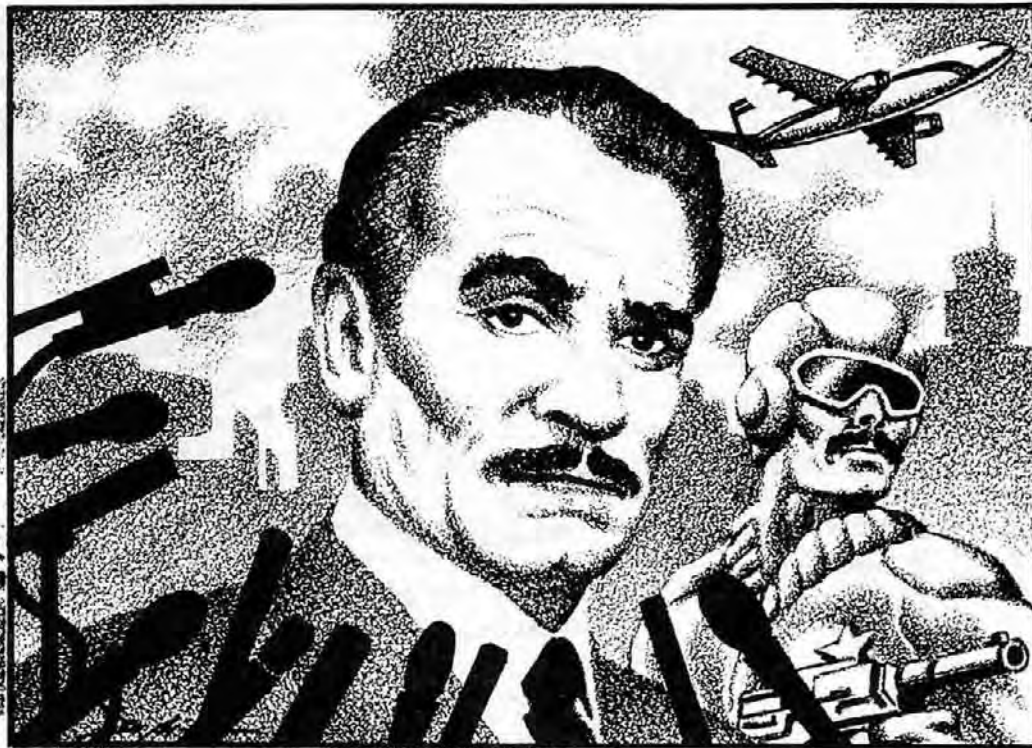
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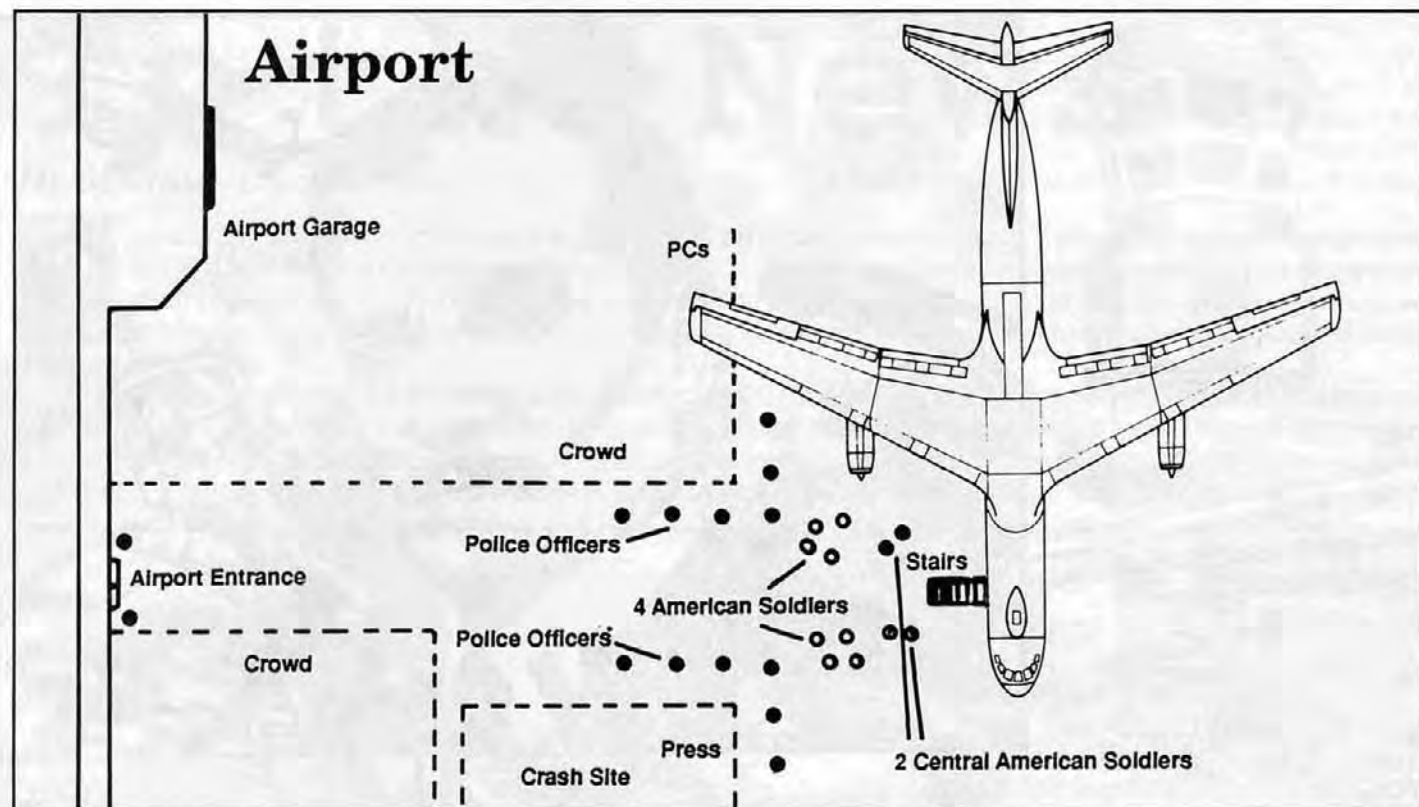
By Michael LaBossiere

Running a media campaign or a campaign with media emphasis can be difficult. Perhaps the most serious problem is trying to make the campaign exciting but maintain the flavor of media involvement—wherein the players are often reduced to mere recorders of the actions of the heroes, villains and victims. While no magic formula will guarantee a proper balance, the following miniadventure is an example of how to effectively integrate the media into your campaign.

This adventure is intended for a PC media team. Nonmedia NPCs can be included in the crowd, in the police force or where appropriate. The PCs will be given a minicam, lights, sound equipment, press passes and so forth. They will also receive a van or car, depending on the size of the team. Their assignment is to cover the arrival of Judge Hector Consales at the airport and, if possible, interview him. Consales is under several death threats, so they'll have to be careful.







BRIEFING

Judge Hector Consales is best known for his work against the Central and South American drug cartels which have plagued the continent for over three decades. He has been instrumental in the breakup of at least three cartels, has personally sentenced 22 major drug figures to jail terms, and has given four death sentences.

Because of his commitment to the fight against drugs, his integrity and refusal to be bribed, it should be of no surprise that he has been threatened with death. There have been 15 separate attempts on his life in the past eight months, predominantly from the Vento cartel, which he is currently targeting.

GETTING STARTED

Once the PCs get their gear together, they can drive out to the airport. After they park and head toward the landing area, they will notice a lot of airport security, police and military guards. As they get closer, the PCs will be stopped, and their equipment and passes will be checked. Finally, the team will be cleared, and a guide will be assigned to take them to their area.

A fairly large crowd has gathered, including representatives of antidrug groups, as well as those who favor the legalization of drugs. The latter range from (apparently) harmless "deadhead" types to the more dangerous looking 'dorphers. There are also many "normal" people, eager for a media circus.

When they arrive with their escort in their assigned area, they will be dismayed to find themselves placed, not in the reserved media area, but behind the wing of the plane and in with the crowd. The guide will apologize, but will insist that nothing can be done at this point.

Security is even tighter this close to the plane. Two Central

American soldiers wearing body armor and carrying automatic weapons flank each side of the airplane steps. They are backed up by eight American National Guard soldiers, four to a side. Behind them and closer to the crowd are a dozen police officers in crowd-control gear, carrying automatic weapons and tear gas grenades.

The judge will begin his descent down the stairway as planned. He will frown slightly, then hesitate and peer up into the sky. A helicopter will fly in low as bullets begin to ricochet off the tarmac and the plane. The crowd will panic—screaming and trying to head for the door. Police will try to keep order as the soldiers start firing back at the assailant.

A military helicopter will swoop in behind the first helicopter and begin firing at it. Suddenly, the two helicopters become tangled together, and both crash to the ground into the reserved media area. Burning fuel and flying bits of the vehicles fill the air, and the crowd becomes frenzied in its terror.

Of course, this is not the end of the show. The door to the airport garage opens, and three vehicles of armed men roar out, crashing through the crowd toward the plane. Behind the vehicles several men in airport uniforms begin firing at the police and the crowd. The PCs are in the path of the onslaught.

The scene is now utter chaos. The surviving police and military try to get at the attackers, while the crowds try to get away, and the attackers trying to destroy the plane.

Vehicles

The airplane has an SP value of 20 and an SDP of 150, has an hour and a half of fuel and is unarmed. A pilot, co-pilot and navigator are on board, as well as about 10 unarmed passengers.

The attackers use the vehicles that normally haul the

baggage carts. They have an SP of 12 (but are open and do not protect those riding on them) and an SDP of 90. Mounted on each of the vehicles is an M-60 squad light machinegun and a single rocket tube (see page 74 of *Solo of Fortune*). There will be three attackers on each vehicle: the driver, gunner and rocket firer.

Judge Hector Consales

Hector Consales is a brave man and is dedicated to cleaning up his country. While he knows that his country is economically bad off, he also knows that drugs are not the solution. He has no qualms about using his pistol to kill his attackers.

Int	8	Tech	5
Ref	7	Cool	9
Luck	7	Att	6
Emp	6	Body	6

Skills: Athletics+2, Pistol+2, English+6, Specific Knowledge (Law)+7, Interview+6, Interrogation+4, Streetwise+2, Persuasion+4.

Hardware: Interface plugs, biomonitor.

Equipment: Kevlar suit jacket SP 18, C.A. "Bulldog" .44 pistol.

Central American Soldiers (Solos)

These soldiers are Consales' bodyguards. They are loyal to him and the government, and will do their best to keep Consales alive.

Int	6	Tech	5
Ref	7/8	Cool	8
Luck	6	Att	5
Emp	5	Body	7

Skills: Athletics+5, Martial Arts+2, Pistol+3, Rifle+5, Awareness+5, Melee Weapons+3.

Hardware: Reflex boosters, biomonitors, interface plugs.

Equipment: Helmet (SP=20), flack vest (SP=20), smartchipped H&K MP5 and two clips, combat knife, Browning Hi Power, two clips, headset radio.

American National Guard

These soldiers will be determined to stop the attackers to keep them from killing any more civilians, especially since some of the men have family and friends in the crowd.

Int	6	Tech	5
Ref	7	Cool	7
Luck	5	Att	5
Emp	6	Body	7

Skills: Athletics+3, Brawling+2, Pistol+3, Rifle+4, Awareness+2, Melee Weapons+2.

Hardware: Skinwatch.

Equipment: Flack vest (SP=20), helmet (SP=20), M16 A2, two clips, Browning Hi Power, two clips, headset radio.

Police

These police will try to get the crowd out of danger. If this means shooting the attackers, so much the better.

Int	6	Tech	5
Ref	6	Cool	6
Luck	5	Att	5
Emp	6	Body	7

Skills: Athletics+3, Brawling+3, Melee Weapons+4, Pistol+4, Rifle+2, Awareness+2, Intimidation+4.

Hardware: Skinwatch.

Equipment: Riot armor (SP=20), Uzi 9mm and two clips, S&W Combat Magnum and four fast loaders, riot stick, two tear gas grenades, headset radio.



Attackers

These are the fodder of Vento. Before going into action they will shoot up with Black Lace, which will raise their Cool by 2. It will also make them into cold, inhuman killing machines, which is the way they like it. Their assignment is to keep the police and military busy by killing them and panicking the crowd so the others can get a clear shot at the plane. They are completely expendable and replaceable, like most drug users.

Int	4	Tech	3
Ref	6	Cool	7/9
Luck	4	Att	3
Emp	2	Body	6

Skills: Athletics+2, Brawling+2, Melee Weapons+4, Pistol+1, Rifle+3.

Hardware: None.

Equipment: Flack vests (SP=20), M16A2 and four clips, combat knife.

Attackers (Vehicle)

These men are soldiers of the Vento cartel. They will try to get close to the plane and hit it with a rocket. They men are under the influence of 'dorph.

Int	6	Tech	5
Ref	7	Cool	4
Luck	5	Att	4
Emp	3	Body	7

Skills: Athletics+4, Brawling+3, Pistol+3, Rifle+4, Heavy Weapons+2, Drive+3.

Hardware: None.

Equipment: Flack Jackets (SP=20), Ingram Mac 10 and four clips.

FINISH

If the characters get a good story (it will be exclusive, the rest of the press having died in the helicopter crash), they will be well rewarded: pay bonus, choice assignments, new equipment, nameplates for their cubicles, etc. If the story is truly awesome (with lots of graphic pictures of explosions and death), then the PCs will receive appropriate rewards. If the PCs intervene and help the police and military, they will earn the appreciation of the police and military to the degree they are helpful. Of course, to this degree they will be hated by the Vento cartel and may be marked for death.

If the judge survives, he will continue to go after the Vento cartel with even greater energy, and the cartel will try to kill him (and maybe the PCs, too) with equal determination. Ω

For equipment and additional media adventures, see "Live Eye" by Michael LaBossiere in **Challenge 57**. Ω



Battle for Mandalore

**An advanced battle scenario
for *Star Wars Miniatures Battles***

By Chris Hind

Ten soldiers wearing the distinctive gray uniforms of the Republican Army and a half-dozen black-clad Jedi Knights advance cautiously through the deserted, rubble-choked streets of Mandalore. Black smoke hangs heavily in the air. Army Lieutenant Weirs matches strides with Voli Quana, Jedi mistress.

"Your soldiers fight with remarkable order," Quana says, "even in these chaotic conditions."

"The troops are obeying orders which I haven't even given yet," Weirs responds. "It's you, isn't it? Doing something to their minds—to all our minds—to keep us disciplined and in high morale. That's why you look so haggard."

"The governor is still in the city," Quana says, "but he is preparing to escape in a private spacecraft. He must be tried for crimes against the Republic. I am telepathically relaying all your orders so we may reach him in time. And do not concern yourself with my health, for my ally is the Fo...." Quana stops, covering her eyes with a hand.

"What's wrong?" Weirs asks.

"Halt your troops, lieutenant. I sense...."

Suddenly a loud blast and the flash of a bright blue beam. An ambush! Weirs' chest explodes, and his body spins into an alley. Quana's amber-bladed lightsaber is in her hand, ignited, in time to deflect a second blast aimed at her. In the next second, dozens of blue and red blaster bolts intersect the smoky streets, ionizing the air and sending chunks of formex flying with each near miss. The final battle for Mandalore begins!

This adventure is set long before the time period covered in the *Star Wars* movies. The end of the Old Republic nears.

Soon, several skirmishes raging across the galaxy will become Clone Wars. Governor Vrox of Mandalore, a secret supporter of Senator Palpatine, has taken advantage of the galaxy's chaos to become virtual dictator of his planet. Rather than feed his greed by taxing his own people, Vrox has sent the small but potent Mandalorian Armed Forces to raid neighboring star systems. He is also suspected of the illegal manufacture of war 'droids. The senate has dispatched a contingent of Republican Army soldiers and Jedi Knights to the Mandalore systems in a desperate attempt to restore order.

After knocking out Mandalore's planetary defenses, Republican forces began a ground assault rather than rely on planetary bombardment—they wished to minimize civilian injuries and damage to the capital city. Vrox, however, did not hesitate to use artillery strikes against Republican forces within city

once the battle swung against him. Before the artillery was silenced, these strikes caused most of the damage and deaths in the capital city.

Now, the battle is nearly over. Most of the Mandalorian soldiers have been routed. Governor Vrox fled his fortress-estate before it was assaulted and is preparing to escape in his private staryacht. he charges a squad of his elite Mandalorian commandos with delaying Republican troops while he prepares to lift off.

The referee may modify the suggested forces or create his own using 1000 points per side. The small number of troops involved in the battle minimizes confusion, represents the skirmish atmosphere in urban warfare and makes it easy for players to obtain miniatures to represent the troops. If everyone agrees, a higher number of points may be used when selecting forces.

REPUBLICAN FORCES

Rebel troopers will provide suitable models to represent the Republican Army troopers. Voli Quana and her Jedis can be taken from *Rebel Characters* (female minor Jedi, female gambler and male minor Jedi), *Return of the Jedi* (Luke in Jedi outfit) and *Heroes of the Rebellion* (Luke Skywalker and Obi-wan Kenobi).

Pico-12 Squad

5 Veteran Republican Army troopers.
DEX 3, blaster 5; KNO 2; MEC 2;
PER 2; STR 2, brawling 4; TEC 2.
Walk Rate: 7".
Run Rate: 11".
Weapons: Blaster rifle.
Commander: Command 3.
Specialist: Heavy weapons 5, DEMP gun.
Squad Generation Points: 173.

Modulus Squad

As above except:
Specialist: Medicine 4, three medpacks.
Squad Generation points: 193.

Knights of the Force Squad

5 Elite minor Jedis.
DEX 3, blaster 4, lightsaber 6; KNO 4;
MEC 2; PER 3, command 6, search 5;
STR 3; TEC 2; control 1.
Walk Rate: 7".
Run Rate: 11".
Weapons: Blaster pistol, lightsaber (damage 6).

Special Rules: This squad may split into smaller squads or even individuals at no penalty so long as Voli Quana lives. If she is overkilled, all surviving troops must regroup as quickly as possible and suffer separation penalties until they do.

Squad Generation Points: 410.

Voli Quana, Jedi Mistress

DEX 3, lightsaber 8; KNO 4; MEC 2;
PER 3, command 6; STR 3, climb/jump 5;
TEC 2; control 5, sense 5, alter 4.
Walk Rate: 7".
Run Rate: 8".
Weapons: Lightsaber (damage 10).
Force Powers: Absorb/Dissipate Energy (C), Receptive Telepathy (S), Life Sense (S), Projective Telepathy (CS), Telekinesis (A).
Force Points: 6 (two rolls).
Squad Generation Points: 225.

MANDALORIAN FORCES

The simplest choice of Mandalorian commandos is to use models from *Stormtroopers*. Boba Fett and IG-88 from *Bounty Hunters* make a perfect Janx Ferro and JU-9, respectively.

Wraith Squad

10 Elite Mandalorian commandos.
DEX (3), Blaster (6), Melee (7); KNO 2;
MEC 2; PER 3 STR 3 (4); TEC 2.
Walk Rate: 7".
Run Rate: 11".
Weapons: Blaster carbine, vibroblade.
Bounty Hunter Armor: STR +1, DEX -1.
Specialist: Heavy weapons (4), flamethrower.
Special Rules: This squad may separate into smaller squads or even individuals at no penalty. Troops may continue to operate in this manner even if Janx Ferro is killed.
Squad Generation Points: 675.

Commander Janx Ferro, Mandalorian Hero

DEX (3), blaster (7), dodge (5); KNO 3,
survival 5; MEC 3; PER 3; STR 4 (5),
brawling 7, climb/jump 6; TEC 2.
Walk Rate: 7".
Run Rate: 11".
Weapons: Blaster carbine (with targeting computer), 3 fragmentation grenades.
Bounty Hunter Armor: STR +1, DEX -1,
integrated camouflage suit.
Force Points: 2 (one roll).
Squad Generation Points: 184.

JU-9 Juggernaut, War 'Droid

DEX 3, blaster 5, heavy weapons 5;
KNO 1; MEC 1; PER 2; STR (7); TEC 1.
Move: 6.
Weapons: Heavy blaster pistol (in turret), vibroaxe, proton torpedo launcher (two shots).
Armor: STR +1.
Programmed for self-destruct capability.

BATTLEFIELD

The battle is fought in the inner city of Mandalore's capital, near the governor's private spaceport. Under normal circumstances, the city streets are clear terrain—no movement or fire penalties, clear LOS. However, recent warfare has caused considerable damage.

Thick smoke covering the battlefield reduces visibility to 6". Since the battle is winding down, the smoke may clear. The referee should roll 2D6 at the end of the special action phase. A roll of 10 or more indicates that visibility increases by 1" each turn.

Rubble from collapsed buildings chokes some of the streets. While mounds of rubble are impassible (as indicated on the map), movement through scattered rubble is at double normal cost. Rubble also provides light cover.

While relatively spacious, the park contains a number of obstructions (scattered trees, statues of Mandalorian heroes and a fountain) which complicate combat. Double movement costs, light cover, LOS 8".

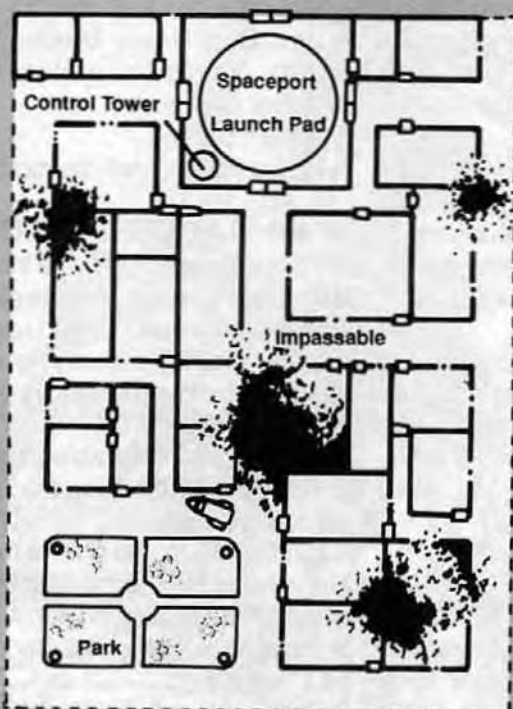
Building doors are locked (Strength 4, Security Rating 2), and must be unlocked or smashed, shot or blasted through to open. Open doors cost 2" to cross. Windows cost 4" to cross, including time spent to break them and then climb through. All walls are reinforced with a Strength of 6.

The spaceport is a little better defended than civilian buildings. The gates have a Strength and Security Rating of 6, while the walls have a Strength of 8.

SETUP

The Mandalorians begin anywhere on the map and may be hidden in ambush if the player so chooses. The Republican forces start anywhere within 3" of the west edge of the map. Since most of the Mandalorians have been defeated and the rest of the Republican Army is busy elsewhere, neither side receives reinforcements during this battle.

Battle Map



VICTORY CONDITIONS

The Republican forces win the battle if they capture Governor Vrox. The Mandalorian forces win by preventing this. In *Star Wars* history, the Jedis won the war on Mandalore. Only Boba Fett and a few other Mandalorian commandos survived.

REFEREE'S NOTES

The following special rules and situations (except those for capturing the governor) are optional.

Capturing the Governor: The Republican forces have 20 turns in which to stop Vrox from blasting off in his spacecraft. After reaching the spaceport and breaking in to the structure, they still must ground the star yacht. One method is to breach the outer hull of the ship, rendering it unsafe for take-off. Hits are automatic, but the attacker must still overcome the hull's Strength of 10.

Another way of at least delaying the governor is to use a DEMP gun to ionize the starship's controls. This works similar to ionizing a 'droid. (See DEMP Gun section on page 54 of the rules and 'Droid Damage on page 73.) "System damage" delays the ship for four turns, and "roll twice for system damage" delays the ship for six turns.

lized combat. During each special actions phase, roll 1D6 to see which direction the crowd moves in (like a grenade scatter roll: 1=north, 2=north-east, etc.). Move the crowd 1D6x2 inches in this direction. If movement is obstructed, the crowd stops for this turn. Troops attempting to move through crowds make opposed STR rolls (crowds have STR 2). If the troops succeed, they may move at double normal cost. If the troops fail, they are wounded and fall prone.

Getting a Lift: The map shows the suggested starting position of a damaged repulsorlift transport. A soldier may try to start this vehicle during the special actions phase by making a TEC roll with a difficulty of 6. Once the vehicle is started, up to five models may ride in it. (The vehicle has Move 15 and Strength 4.) Shots aimed at troops in the vehicle hit the vehicle on a 1D6 roll of 5 or 6. If the hit causes damage, the repulsorlift crashes unless the driver makes a Repulsorlift roll (Difficulty 6) to bring it to a safe stop. A crash may also result when the driver performs dangerous stunts (e.g., turning corners at a speed of 10 or more, traversing rubblestrewn streets or ramming enemy soldiers). If the driver fails a Repulsorlift roll with a difficulty of 5, the vehicle

A third method of stopping the star yacht is by closing the launch doors on top of the building. A soldier inside the control tower (it takes two turns to get inside and upstairs) may make a TEC roll with a difficulty level of 4.

Panic-Stricken Crowds: Place three 1.5" radius circles (identical to grenade burst templates) on the battlefield, somewhere in the streets. These represent panic-stricken crowds which run about in a chaotic manner and generally get in the way of civi-

crashes. (See Damage to Riders, page 69 of the rules.)

Building Interior Templates: Before a soldier enters a building, the referee may wish to roll or choose one of the ideas on the table below.

BUILDING INTERIOR TEMPLATES

Roll	Result
1-3	Empty: Door locked on a 1D6 roll of 1-3.
4-6	Civilians: Door locked. A terrified family responds to the intrusion by running around like Verviks with their heads chopped off. Treat as a crowd.
7-8	Danger: Door locked on a 1D6 roll of 1-2. Before entering the building, a soldier may make a KNO test (Difficulty 5) to realize that it has been damaged during the fighting and is perhaps unsafe. If he enters, the roof, walls, and/or floor collapse. Unless the soldier makes a DEX test (difficulty 6) to get out of the building safely, he takes one STR 4 hit.
9	Crazies: Door locked. The family who lives here does not take kindly to strangers, Mandalorian or Republican. The 1D6 inhabitants attack with improvised weapons but will not leave their home. <i>All Attributes:</i> 2. <i>Walk Rate:</i> 6". <i>Run Rate:</i> 10". <i>Weapons:</i> sporting blaster, club.
10	Watsip: Door unlocked. The owners of the building are not home, but they have left their pet—a vicious Watsip. DEX 3, STR 2, PER 3. <i>Move:</i> 10 <i>Orn. Code:</i> —. <i>Attack Forms:</i> Bite (4).
11	Hospital: Assume an unlimited medpack supply.
12	Police: Most of the law enforcement personnel are out on riot-control duty, leaving only an elderly desk sergeant in charge. Any soldier, Mandalorian or Republican, who makes a successful Command roll (difficulty 8) may gain access to smoke and stun grenades (but a soldier can carry only two grenades at a time). Ω

CHALLENGE Conventions

THE CONTINUUM, March 4-5 in northwest Ohio. For additional information, contact The CONTINUUM, c/o David Wade, 721 High #91-D, Bowling Green, OH 43402.

WORLD HORROR CONVENTION, March 5-8 at the Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza, Nashville, TN. For more details, contact World Horror Convention 1992, PO Box 22817, Nashville, TN 37202.

PLATTECON EPSILON, March 6-8 at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville Student Center. For more information, contact the Platteville Gaming Assn., Student Center, 1 University Plaza, Platteville, WI 53818.

BASHCON '92, March 13-15 at the University of Toledo Student Union auditorium. Please send a SASE to the Student Activities Office, UT-Bash, 2801 W. Bancroft St., Toledo, OH 43606.

SPRING OFFENSIVE III, March 20-22 at Illinois Central College, East Peoria, IL. For additional information, contact the Tri-County Gaming Association, 116 Walnut St., Washington, IL.

NEOVENTION XI, March 27-29 at the Gardner Student Center on the University of Akron campus. Send a SASE to University Gaming Society, Gardner Student Center #6, University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325.

LANUA FANTASY III, March 27-29 in Genova, Italy. For additional information, contact Labyrinth, Vico S. Antonio 5/3A, 16126, Genova, Italy.

POCON, April 3-5 at the Holiday Inn in Bartonsville, PA. For additional

information, write to Ed Dowgaillo, PO Box 390, Effort, PA 18330.

FANTASY FEST SPRING '92, April 4-5 at the Days Inn in Shamokin Dam, PA. Write to A & B Entertainment, PO Box 645, Shamokin Dam, PA 17876.

ARCATACON '92, April 24-26 at Humboldt State University. Contact Don Raymond, 4722 Cypress Hall, JGC, Arcata, CA 95521.

CONDUIT 2, May 15-17 at the Quality Inn in Salt Lake City, UT. Write to Conduit 2, c/o Dave Powell, 2566 Blaine Ave., SLC, UT 84108-3359.

GAMEX '92, May 22-25 at the Los Angeles Airport Hyatt Hotel. For more information, contact Strategicon, PO Box 8399, Long Beach, CA 90808.

GAMESCAUCUS II '92, May 22-25 at the Oakland Airport Hilton in Oakland, CA. For more information, contact TriGaming Associates, PO Box 4867, Walnut Creek, CA 94596-0867.

LAGACON 14, June 6 at the Fraternal Order of Eagles, 116 N. 8th St., Lebanon, PA. For additional information, you can contact the Lebanon Area Gamers Assn., 806 Cumberland St., Lebanon, PA 17042.

TANELORN OPEN GAMING TITLES, June 6-8 at the Robertson Gardens Convention Centre, 281 Kessels Road, Robertson, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. For more information, contact Club Tanelorn, GPO Box 2148, Brisbane Qld 4001, Australia.

ORGANIZED KAHN-FUSION IV, June 20-21 at the Embers in Carlisle,

PA. For more information, contact M. Fonier's Games Only Emporium, 200 Third St., New Cumberland, PA 17070.

DRAGON CON '92, July 17-19 at the Atlanta Hilton and Towers, Atlanta, GA. For additional information, send a SASE to Dragon Con '92, Box 47696, Atlanta, GA 30362-0696.

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Putting the "Science" in SF RPGs

By Charles E. Gannon

As a famous purveyor (and writer) of speculative fiction once observed, science fiction is the improbable made probable, whereas fantasy is the impossible made possible. Although the line dividing the improbable from the impossible seems to grow blurrier every day, one important distinction between SF and fantasy remains unchanged. Most responsible SF attempts to base itself on the observed "facts" of the physical universe and what can be extrapolated therefrom, whereas fantasy need not concern itself with such issues of empirical rectitude.

Although the standards are generally less rigorous, the same empirical criteria that is applied to SF fiction is usually applied to SF roleplaying games as well. From the far-future "hard" SF approach of *MegaTraveller*, to the near-future soft SF/mystical milieu of games such as *Shadowrun*, some attempt to obey the basic laws of physics is integral to the rules.

However, since most of us referees and players are not physicists (self included), it is all too easy to find ourselves in situations where the scientific realities are over our head or where we are not even aware that we are changing the laws of physics. While empirical rectitude is certainly no prerequisite for enjoying an SF RPG, many fans of the genre find that play is enhanced by the "realities" of the futuristic environment in which they are operating. These "realities" do not require special rules in order to integrate them into a game and are therefore presented here in a format that is decidedly not "game-specific." These "reality tidbits" are as useful with *Dark Conspiracy* and *Cyberpunk* as they are with *MegaTraveller*. They offer new challenges and adventure ideas for players, as well as setting the record straight on some of the more glaring (and frequently encountered) scientific inaccuracies that we've all encountered over the course of playing SF RPGs.

SEEING THE LIGHT... OR NOT

Lasers, solar power and stellar spectral

types present some concepts that are often misunderstood.

Lasers

Probably one of the most common scenes in SF RPGs goes something like this:

Your space fighter angles in toward the enemy dreadnought. As you confirm your intercept vector, you charge your lasers and fire. The tremor and hum of suddenly activated megawatt-level power conduits sends a vibration up your spine as the two red beams arrow toward their target....

Maybe, but not likely—since laser beams are not visible in vacuum. The characteristic shafts of brightly hued energy only become visible when there are gas molecules to scatter the emitted radiation sideways. As unlikely as this may seem, consider any actual footage you may have seen of spacecraft or space-walking astronauts who are employing focused-beam illumination; there is no shaft of light such as we associate with a flashlight played across our backyards at night.

In space, a beam of light is only visible when one is looking directly at its source. In the case of a laser, this would mean looking straight down the barrel—probably not the most auspicious perspective from which to inspect the weapon's operation.

Of course, no beam remains perfectly focused. All lose coherence, meaning that they tend to "spread out" over distance. Any individual in this expanded "field" is able to see the light, but in the case of even a handheld, weapon-grade laser, the field probably wouldn't expand to more than a few meters across over a distance of 100,000 kilometers. So for all practical intents and purposes, observers would once again find themselves looking "straight down the barrel" if they wanted to see anything.

The misconception regarding the visibility of laser beams in vacuum is certainly understandable—and is widely shared by well-known SF authors and even the technical illustrators charged with presenting depictions of the Star Wars weapon systems. First off, it seems common-sensical that lasers *should* be visible; after all, we're talking about concentrated beams of multi-

megawatt intensity. Unfortunately, all the energy in the universe doesn't compensate for the lack of a refractive medium—such as air—which serves to sidescatter some of the rays and make the beam visible. Secondly, the notion of "invisible" lasers is certainly, well—less colorful. And for artists—or novelists or RPG referees—who want to impart graphic excitement to a scene, there's nothing to match those "bright actinic beams" which have become the standby of SF movies, books and gaming.

Of course, many SF RPGs *do* offer weapons which give a beam-like visual effect in vacuum. Any weapons which employ energy plasma are certainly one example. A plasma bolt is a superheated atomic soup which emits light independently as it travels to its target. Therefore, any individual who is looking at the bolt will see its brightness.

Of course, once they are within an atmosphere, laser beams will show up again. However, it might be that lasers designed for in-atmosphere use employ different wavelengths than those used in a vacuum. Although red tends to be the artists' color of choice for hand-held lasers, dim blue-violet might be just as likely, depending on available power levels. Infrared lasers are quite unlikely, since IR is very susceptible to diffusion and absorption by the atmosphere. However, as one progresses into the realm of visible light, this becomes less of a problem. But once in this realm, diffraction increases as the wavelength of the light decreases. If enough power were available, lasers could employ UV light, making the beam all but invisible. However, even this weapon would still leave a visible trail in the atmosphere. This trail would be in the form of a dotted line of sparks, created by the beam's disruption of atmospheric atoms, many of which would have their electrons torn loose by the laser's electromagnetic potential.

Solar Power

Many SF RPGs include a provision for powering space vessels via solar power. This technology is completely reasonable, but when players are operating among the outer planets, referees might want to give some consideration to what is known as the inverse square law. This law states that as distance increases exponentially, energy intensity (such as that associated with light) decreases exponentially. For example, let's say that at a distance of 10 kilometers, a beam had an intensity rating of 4. If we square the distance—making it 100 kilometers—we must then take the square root of the intensity, giving us 2.

While this extremely simplified version of the inverse square law is still too precision-oriented for easy application in an SF RPG, referees can impart the feel of this by *halv-*

ing energy intake from solar panels that are located more than one orbital position beyond a system's habitable zone. In our own solar system, therefore, this would mean that the panels would perform as well out near Mars as they would at earth—but out near Jupiter, only half the energy would be available.

Another situation in which the inverse square law can provide referees and players with a handy, generalized benchmark is in determining the relation between radioactive exposure levels and distance from the source of the radiation (more on that later).

Stellar Spectral Types

As almost all SF RPG referees and players will be aware, stars tend to come in some colors and not in others. Nature arranges it so that blue, white, yellow, orange and red are by far the most popular shades. Accordingly, stars tend to tint objects that their light falls upon with their own color. Unfortunately, it can be somewhat easy to overlook—or forget—this factor when resolving adventures on a planet with an atmosphere, particularly when it offers humans a short sleeves environment. The notion of breathable air, pleasant temperatures and abundant water conjures up images of green trees and a blue sky.

The fact of the matter is that a dim red star emits very little—if any—violet or blue light. So regardless of how much water is on the surface or how breathable the atmosphere might be, a blue sky is extremely unlikely (unless there is a pervasive, blue-colored windspore or the equivalent). Therefore, to get an idea of the probable unmodified color of a planet's sky, it is necessary to consider the spectral class of the world's sun.

The color of the sun indicates the wavelengths of light which are being produced. A blue star is therefore producing a preponderance of light in the high end of the visible spectrum—violet, indigo, blue. The fewer long wavelength emissions (such as yellow, orange and red) combine with the dominant emissions to produce a limited amount of white light.

At the other end of the spectrum, a red star produces a preponderance of visible light with very long wavelengths—almost all red, some orange. It is very unlikely that there are any appreciable amounts of any shorter wavelength light emissions; yellow is unlikely, green practically impossible.

What this means, then, is that on a world with a red star, there will not be a blue sky. Hazy salmon would be more likely (a mix of red, orange and any vapor). Water would not be blue, for there is no blue sky to reflect. Instead, it would be grayish red.

Of course, even if plants were green, they wouldn't appear that way; under red light,

green appears as gray. However, some plants (and animals) might emit blue or green light of their own, either as lures or secondary sex characteristics—since these colors would stand out markedly from the somewhat monochromatic backdrop.

The next factor in determining the color of a local sky is the density of its atmosphere. In general, the thicker an atmosphere is, the better it is at diffusing lower wavelength light. Consequently, if earth's atmosphere were half again as thick, we'd find our sky to be a little more green, perhaps almost aqua in color. This is because green is the band of visible light that is just under blue in terms of wavelength. Conversely, if our atmosphere were half as dense, the sky would be a deeper, darker blue, with a more translucent appearance—which is exactly how earth's sky looks as one increases altitude. At the point where there is no atmosphere at all, there is no sky color since there is nothing to diffuse the light. This returns us to the light in vacuum environment we looked at earlier.

Combining the spectral values with the atmospheric effects is not really very tricky, particularly if you're dealing in broad approximations. For instance, what if a world with a red star had a thin atmosphere? Well, probably the daytime sky would appear as a dim red sheath through which some stars might still be visible. Why? Because a thin atmosphere has a hard enough time filtering out short wavelength light like blue—and there's none of that coming from the local star. Almost all the light is red, which means that at high noon, when the light is most direct and the atmosphere has the least refractive effect, there is very little diffusion going on.

However, as the sun sinks toward the horizon, the light must pass through more atmosphere to reach the observer. This means that the sky will become a little more opaque and brighter just *before* sunset (and after dawn).

Another simple example—a world with a very dense atmosphere circling a white star. In all likelihood, the sky would be blue, similar to that of earth. Although the atmosphere is able to diffuse light with longer wavelengths (such as green), it is also scattering a greater amount of short wavelength light (blue, indigo, violet). The net result might be a little bit greener than our own sky, but probably not much.

In addition to providing a logical means for figuring out some very colorful and different alien visual environments, the color of ambient light may also have some interesting practical play effects. For instance, in a predominantly red light environment, humans are essentially color-blind. All that can be distinguished is red, gray-red and black. Any nonluminous color-coding will become essentially useless. Luminous color-coding

could have some interesting effects of its own—perhaps that is the cue for some local carnivore's mating ritual or territorial challenge.

In an environment where variation of color is very rare, uncommon hues are sure to elicit a profound response from local lifeforms.

APPROACHING THE STARBOW'S END

For many SF RPGs, the central feature that distinguishes the environment as futuristic is the reality of faster-than-light travel. Actually, "faster" can be a somewhat confusing term, in that we normally associate the word "fast" with "velocity." However, in most SF RPGs, FTL actually means "requiring less time than light" (a feat usually achieved by a field-effect rather than simple acceleration).

This doesn't stop certain adventurous souls from trying to break the light-speed barrier the hard way, however. Assuming a large fuel supply and sufficient acceleration, the magical velocity of "C" (approximately 186,000 miles per second) would seem to be in reach. For instance, in *MegaTraveller*, a little quick math will suggest that with several months of acceleration at 4G, a ship could break the C barrier. Unfortunately, that's not quite the case—at least not if Einstein's theory of relativity is indeed correct.

Most SF RPG gamers are quite familiar with the relativistic time paradox that is integral to any consideration of travel at high velocities. Individuals on board a vessel approaching light-speed might experience time passage equal to a day, while their children back home on earth might age a year or two.

However, a less-popularized consequence of the theory of relativity is that as velocity increases, so does mass—and that can have some distressing effects on one's ability to maintain a constant level of acceleration. Without going into lots of mathematical equations, the following chart offers a quick sample of how increased velocity relates to both time dilation and mass increase:

Velocity (fraction of C)	Time Dilation Factor	Mass Increase Factor
0.1	0.995	1.005
0.5	0.866	1.155
0.9	0.436	2.294
0.99	0.141	7.089
0.9999	0.014	70.712
1.0	0.0	—Infinity—

Since velocity is inevitably tied to the relationship between thrust and mass, higher velocity levels mean disproportionately

higher thrust costs. At C itself, since mass becomes infinite, effective thrust becomes functionally impossible—preventing the object from ever breaking the light-speed barrier.

However, for those souls who still wish to test the edges of Einsteinian reality, a number of dramatic changes will be noted at the extraordinary velocities indicated on the preceding chart.

One such effect is time dilation. For example, a passenger on a craft travelling at 0.5 C would experience only 0.866 days for every "objective" (or sidereal) day elapsed. However, long before these effects would be very noticeable, such travellers would observe a visual phenomenon known as the "starbow."

The starbow would increasingly dominate the traveller's view of the universe as the velocity approached C. In appearance, the starbow would offer a field of blue-violet stars ahead.

These blue-violet stars would actually indicate the locations of red stars, whose long wavelength light emissions would be "compacted" by the tremendous forward velocity of the spacecraft. This compaction functionally reduces the wavelength of the light, thereby creating blue-violet from the original red light.

To the rear, blue and white stars would show up as red. In the inverse of the first process, their wavelengths would effectively be "stretched out," altering the color toward the lower end of the visible scale.

Between these two extremes would be a two-toned spectrum, ranging from a blue-violet nimbus surrounding the forward view to that of a deep red halo behind.

The last major consideration regarding the (anticipated) realities of light speed travel is that of time-travel—a subject which most SF authors (and referees) prefer to avoid. For those individuals who gape at the mere notion of temporal paradox, the rules of relativity offer a safe haven: Time can only run backward when velocities in excess of C are achieved.

So, to the collective relief of overburdened referees everywhere, characters in SF RPGs should find it impossible to go back in time.

SIMPLY RADIANT

Nuclear energy—and radiation—is certainly a common part of most SF RPGs. Whether as a warhead, power plant or lethal danger, it tends to play a major role in almost any futuristic environment.

However, since experts and the media are fond of making radiation and radioactive materials seem impossibly complex, many SF RPG gamers join the rest of society in accepting the often-flawed Hollywood portrayals as models for reality.

In actuality, there are a few basic rules and facts which, once known, can go a long way to adding new challenges and color to a science-fiction roleplaying game environment.

Nuke 'Em 'Til They Glow?

While a dim, blue-white nimbus is associated with certain forms of radioactive emission, the idea that a person (or any organic matter) will "glow" due to exposure is inaccurate. Only objects which emit radiation (and lots of it) will glow.

Which brings up an important distinction—that between radioactive exposure and contamination. Exposure means that an individual has been hit by radioactive emissions. Contamination means that the individual has been (or is still) in contact with radioactive substances (such as plutonium dust, etc.). The important distinction here is that an individual who has been exposed poses no danger to others. However, an individual who has been contaminated must be checked for emissions since some of the contaminant may still be on (or worse still, inside) the body. (For *MegaTraveller* players who wish an accurate—and exhaustive—overview of radiation effects and treatment, see the article "Nuclear Radiation" by Mark Gelinas in *The Traveller's Digest 15*, published by Digest Group Publications).

Players who are working around nuclear radiation or its byproducts should be challenged by the protocols necessary for avoiding exposure and contamination—protocols which become difficult to follow as situations become more volatile.

Oh No! Mutants!

Another common misconception that has been popularized by the entertainment industry is that exposure to nuclear radiation can cause living beings to mutate. This is simply not true. Nuclear radiation damages organisms, and while it can cause some individual cells to mutate (which often become the propagators of cancer), entire organisms cannot be mutated. Full mutation is the result of wholesale genetic restructuring—an exceedingly delicate bio-engineering task for which the indiscriminate sledgehammer of nuclear radiation is completely unsuited.

Radiation can cause mutations in reproductive cells, thereby causing mutant offspring. However, such offspring are usually short-lived, and those who do survive are often sterile. Furthermore, while powerful monstrosities are conceivable outcomes of such mutagenic exposures, it is much more likely that mutant progeny will be sickly and retarded. A single blast of high-level radiation is not as efficient and elegant a genetic engineer as several dozen millennia of purpose-driven evolution. Conse-

quently, if a referee wants to introduce a rapidly-changing organism into the game, such mutations are most rationally explained by a hypertrophied growth cycle (ala the movie *Alien*) or by a tailored recombinant virus.

Cosmic Radiation

One last source of radiation warrants special mention—cosmic radiation. Cosmic radiation is highly resistant to shielding (usually only a fairly dense atmosphere will do) and pervades most of known space. Emitted by stars, it makes extended EVA operations in even the most protective suits highly inadvisable. Space-rated hulls are likely to diminish its effects considerably, and those constructed by societies which have expertise in gravitic sciences are likely to incorporate a small layer of protective repulsors around those hull areas that are routinely inhabited.

However, the big source of radiation exposure in free space is encountered near that class of planets known as large gas giants. In our own solar system, Jupiter and Saturn provide examples. These huge objects have gravitic and electromagnetic fields so powerful that they can both generate their own radiation belts and also tear apart otherwise stable atomic nuclei, releasing still more radiation. However, most of this radiation is comprised of either electrons or protons, and can therefore be repelled by sufficient negative or positive electromagnetic charges. For a spacesuited figure, however, the exposure levels can be immediately fatal; Voyager Two recorded an accumulated dose in excess of 700,000 rads over the course of two days in near-Jovian space.

For players and referees, this introduces some interesting new game prospects. Operations within the equator-hugging radiation belts of large gas giants become risky operations which must be conducted only during the low-intensity ebbs. Space vehicles which can gain fuel by skimming molecular hydrogen from a gas giant's atmosphere adopt polar insertions—away from the belts—as their standard operating procedure. And settlement on moons within 20 planetary diameters of such planets become even riskier propositions: Everybody run for cover if the electromagnetic shielding malfunctions!

Nuclear Fuel

Most SF RPGs which include nuclear power plants in vehicles also include some reference to the fuel they consume. Typically, the volume of the fuel required is greater than real-world analogs would lead us to believe, while price and mass is much lower.

Whether or not this is a design error,

referees and players alike may find that the following explanation will bring these values into realistic perspective.

Refueling—particularly of combat craft—is a crucial design consideration since the time spent taking on new fuel is typically when even a powerful craft can be rendered extremely vulnerable. Therefore, most designers attempt to arrive at a swift, safe method of refueling a vessel.

In the case of nuclear fuel, this would necessarily involve fuel modules, not the fuel rods that are currently in use by commercial reactors around the world. Such fuel modules would be bulky and heavy, due to the mass required for integral shielding. The actual amount of radioactive material would be quite small—probably a few cubic centimeters at the most.

This material would be stored at the core of each module and accessed via automated systems once the module was prepared for use.

The advantage of such a system would be the ease of handling and, therefore, the speed with which refueling could be carried out. It is necessary to point out that the frequency of refueling required by spacecraft is likely to be much greater than that required by today's closest analogs (naval vessels). This is primarily due to the extraordinary power requirements (and therefore, fuel consumption) of space propulsion systems.

Consequently, a design sequence (such as that in *MegaTraveller*) which suggests that one cubic meter of radioactive fuel only costs 75,000 credits and only masses 12.5 tons can be understood as representing not just the fuel itself, but a "fuel module" optimized for easy use and fast installation. The actual fuel would probably occupy—at most—a dozen cubic centimeters of that space.

IT LEAVES ME BREATHLESS: LIFE & DEATH IN SPACE

Whereas the media has foisted off some profoundly inaccurate portrayals of radiation, it occasionally does a respectable job of showing the effects of explosive decompression and vacuum. However, these are only the most dramatic end of a much subtler spectrum of threatening conditions which can arise from loss of atmosphere.

The most common threat associated with atmosphere loss—or degradation—is known as hypoxia, a situation in which an atmosphere has insufficient oxygen pressure to sustain normal human activity. Long before crewmembers of a stricken spacecraft suffocate, they will pass through this stage.

Some of the most common manifestations of hypoxia are hallucinations, pallor,

perspiration, blue lips, lapses into a semi-conscious stupor, staggering and slurred speech. Individuals suffering from the delusions of hypoxia are quite likely to endanger rescuers and/or hamper any attempts to restore normal atmospheric conditions. At the latter stage of hypoxia, they will fall into a fugue state and, then, a coma.

The classic environmental disaster in space—explosive decompression—can cause a much faster and more grisly death. Unprotected individuals will suffer from the effects of traumatic abaria—the sudden loss of all atmospheric pressure. Consequently, all the contents of one's body that are under pressure suddenly attempt to burst outward, part of their effort to equalize the discrepancy between their internal pressure and that of the surrounding environment.

As films are quite good at portraying, this rapidly causes distension of the skin and a bulging of the eyes. Most human beings can withstand approximately half a minute of this punishment before their bodily systems begin to break down (or blow up).

However, unlike the movies, individuals who have been subjected to more than a few seconds of traumatic abaria do not recover immediately, with the only visible aftereffects being ruffled hair and a thin sheen of perspiration. Quite the contrary—such individuals will strongly resemble semi-conscious roadkill.

Traumatic abaria ruptures capillaries, doing particularly bad damage to the body's mucous membranes, exposed surfaces and sclera. Most cavities will therefore be in pretty sad shape, with bleeding being quite common. Vision may be permanently damaged due to the stresses behind and within the eye.

Similarly, eardrums may have ruptured, if there was any impediment to rapid pressure equalization (such as a history of sinus problems, a headcold, etc.). The entirety of the GI tract will have been badly traumatized, unless the individual had been fasting for several days preceding the episode. The longer a body is subjected to traumatic abaria, the more severe these effects will become.

In short, the survivor of traumatic abaria will feel—and look—like death warmed over. For SF RPG purposes, referees should impose penalties on any tasks being attempted by a player who has been subjected to more than 10 seconds of traumatic abaria, with those penalties increasing in severity as the duration lengthens. Players who manage to survive traumatic abaria should find even the simplest tasks to be very challenging; any efforts requiring real expertise will be impossible for them to complete successfully until they have had several hours to recover.

WEIGHTLESSNESS AND TEMPERATURE

As most players and referees of science-fiction roleplaying games are certainly aware, extended exposure to 0G causes a variety of undesirable changes in the human body. Bones decalcify, cardiac silhouette diminishes, even the immune system is suppressed.

These effects begin within a few days but only become statistically significant in game-terms after about three weeks. Characters who are in 0G for this period of time should find it difficult to reacclimate to earth-normal gravity and should suffer reductions in whatever statistic is used to determine their resistance to disease and physical endurance.

Another important factor of living in space is temperature. The media is fond of relying on the "frigid death in space" image, but for travellers in the habitable zone (or even closer to the primary star), excess heat is an even greater danger. This generally will only present a problem for derelict/disabled hulls, but when the problem exists, it tends to be quite severe.

A hull which is not rotating (thereby effecting thermal equalization as it radiates heat into the cold leeward shadows) or which is not equipped with sufficient radiators may begin to heat rapidly. Even if the spacecraft's life support is still functioning, it will be sorely taxed to compensate for the extra heat.

Consequently, the life support system is likely to run out of power or break down much sooner than otherwise.

Even before the internal temperatures begin to soar to lethal levels, less-protected circuitry and vehicle subsystems are likely to experience burn-outs and failures, further disabling the spacecraft.

Conversely, a spacecraft stranded in the outer system is likely to turn into an unlivable icebox fairly rapidly.

Referees are encouraged to take these basic facts into account when trying to add drama to a "marooned in space" scenario. Players might be compelled to cobble together some home-made propulsion system in order to impart spin to their sun-baked wreck, just so they can survive the first few days after their ship is disabled. Or clever hijackers might try to gain control of a ship with a strategy that emphasizes environmental elegance over brute force. The hijackers might sabotage all the shipside vacc-suits and then reduce the O₂ mix in the atmosphere while dropping the ambient on-board temperature to -20 degrees centigrade.

With the crew and passengers slipping toward simultaneous hypothermia and hypoxia, the players will have to work fast to overcome the hijackers. ☺

Star Wars Miniatures Rules

West End Games.

\$18.00.

Designers: Stephen Crane and Paul Murphy.

112-page softbound miniatures rulebook with cardboard templates.

West End has stepped into the science-fiction miniatures battle with its own set of miniatures rules, based in and on the world of *Star Wars*. The rules follow fairly standard and straightforward rules format, explaining the characteristics of the soldiers the figures represent, detailing movement, ranged and melee combat, describing terrain effects, and outlining morale. The Advanced Game covers the more complex concepts of hidden movement, gamemaster referees, monsters, 'droid robots and heroes (essentially better soldiers, some with the power of the Force). Another section shows the amateur modeler how to make professional-looking terrain (a very nice bit of information, in my opinion). Finally, troop lists, weapon lists and blast templates are provided, along with advertisements for the metal figurines the game is designed around (including parts numbers for those wishing to order them). All very normal.

WHAT IT OFFERS

These rules are, for the most part, easy to understand, clear and concise, without the ambiguities that plague most of the British or British-inspired miniatures rules systems in the science-fiction market. The designers chose to limit their technology and conflicts to the *Star Wars* universe, narrowing the usually bewildering scope of gadgets and rules that burden science-fiction miniatures rules. This seems rather simplistic at first glance, but the lack of complexity is welcome.

The rules for creating squads are somewhat cumbersome the first time around. Practice makes them easier, since some things are relatively constant, no matter what kind of troops you have. And the point system allows for a greater diversity of troops than in some systems: Elite troops. In what way? Greater close combat skill, better equipment, crack shots? They can have it all, or only one or two improved characteristics,

simply by adjusting the point value.

Movement and combat are interesting. In theory, movement is easy; anyone who's ever played any other skirmish rules can catch on easily. But be warned—the sides alternate movement by squads! Combat is accomplished by adding a single die roll to the firer's skill and trying to equal or better a set number; this number is adjusted according to range, target cover, firer movement, etc. Damage is calculated by rolling 1D6 and adding the weapon's strength, then comparing the result to the victim's die roll plus personal strength, assisted by armor. Just like the *Star Wars RPG*. With this system, a figure can be just wounded, not necessarily dead or out of action.

Some of the weapons are merely plebian; others, like the personal proton torpedo launcher, are quite short-ranged but deadly. And grenades are properly lethal, hitting immense areas. This is not a game for military milksops.

The morale system is excellent, simple and easy to understand. A squad's morale determines modifiers to its movement, squad firing and the actions the squad can take. A poorly equipped squad with high morale can cost much more (and be more effective) than a squad with good equipment and low morale.

Even the Force works well, with simplified effects for the miniatures game. Nobody charges a Jedi who's waving a lightsaber around; even the Imperial Zero G Stormtroopers in their powered armor are just victims if the Jedi gets close enough.

WHAT IT LACKS

Does the system seem to be too good to be true so far? Yes, it is. As excellent a job as the designers have done, they failed to include any rules for vehicles. After all, what is *Star Wars* without snow-speeders, land-speeders, walkers and speeder-bikes? And the RPG rules have all sorts of vehicles listed in them. But nowhere are vehicles even spoken of; only infantry actions are covered here.

Grenades still cost way too much. And defensive grenades are one reason why hand-to-hand combat is so rare in modern warfare—you can blow the enemy to shreds before he gets to you.

EVALUATION

The *Star Wars* Miniatures Rules are certainly better than their competition, *Warhammer 40K*. You'll avoid the rules arguments, the ambiguity, the incomplete rules and the exorbitant prices of Citadel minia-

tures (the *Star Wars* miniatures cost \$1.20 apiece, compared to Citadel's \$2.50+ apiece).

Not that these rules will replace *Warhammer 40K* soon. The background and units of Games Workshop's Imperium are more interesting and more colorful. Fortunately, with a little jury-rigging, the units from *Warhammer* can be used with these rules (for instance, the weapon strengths transfer exactly).

In all, these rules are a good investment.

Night City

R. Talsorian Games.

\$18 (US).

Designers: Mike Pondsmith, Ed Boime, Sam Shirley, Anders Swensen, Colin Fisk, Will Moss, John Smith, Mike MacDonald, Lisa Pondsmith.

184-page perfect-bound sourcebook for *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*. Includes 22" by 32" color map of Night City.

Ordinarily, I wait until the end of a review before rendering judgement on a product. Not this time. This is good. Buy it. Right now. Put down the magazine, whisk down to your local games store and pick it up while it lasts. If the store doesn't have it, annoy the manager until he orders it, overnight express. Do it.

What in the world could be so impressive that I advise unreserved consumption of this product? For the record, let me state that I was not bought, coerced, or even influenced in its behalf. I knew that this was a dynamite product the moment I flipped through it at GenCon.

Not that it was the first of its type, of course. FASA brought out its guide to its main cybercity, Seattle, some time ago. It was a good product in its own right, outlining Seattle for the *Shadowrun* fans. But this is better. Much better.

Night City does the same and more. The book is a huge collection of information, arranged in DataTerm style, with cross-referencing so you can find what you need to find when you need to find it. Almost every reference to another section has the page number listed that tells you where to find further information. *Night City* doesn't need an appendix; in a way, it is an appendix!

WHAT'S IN IT?

Night City contains an encyclopedic amount of information on *Night City* itself. The Master Entry Index on the lead page is split into the following categories: Fax on Filetm, America in 2020, History of Night

Reviews by
Craig Sheeley

City, People of Night City, Threat & Security, Gangs of Night City, Flashmaps, Controlled Urban Zones, Phone Access, Net Access, and Message Mail. And each section covers more information than those simple entries would seem to indicate.

Want to know where Night City is? The maps locating it and its surrounding cities and free states are on page 13, in the Flashmaps section. Other maps give overviews of the city, the 'burbs, the airport, etc.

Want Night City's politics? Look up the City Center section and browse through the history section.

Where are the hot places to rock, roll and rumble? Take your pick! The happening joints are everywhere—depending on your social status, of course.

What about services, rentals, information and so on? The ads deluge you before you even start reaching the hard information! Everything you wanted to know about Night City is in this book! (Well, okay, they couldn't pack in every last detail. But they sure tried.)

Each section of the city has all the major buildings identified, with a short overview on each. The major gangs and businesses are lightly profiled—enough to go on, but not enough to get in the reader's way—and prominent local personalities are profiled in game terms. All along the way, information inserts inform the reader of related data. Finally, each city section chapter ends with encounter suggestions (really tags for adventures) and people who can be contacts in each area.

Other chapters cover the nation in 2020 (along with its troubles as they relate to player-characters), the people of Night City, the social strata, major gangs, police and security—the list goes on.

WHAT'S TO LIKE?

First and foremost, *Night City* is a reference work. The detail is wonderful, and brings Night City to life. Sure, the personalities and devices in it are presented in *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0* format, but with a little modification, *Night City* can be used in any cyberpunk-genre system—*GURPS Cyberpunk*, *Rolemaster's Cyberspace*, *Morpheus' Dreams of Steel*, or even *Shadowrun*. The places, people, locations and encounters are all there.

The section on the social strata and people of *Night City* reads like universal descriptions of society in any cyberpunk genre. For referees, it's priceless. Want to know who is who? And where do the privileged work and play? What's the minimum standard for social standing? It's all here.

Finally, *Night City* is intended for hands-on use by the players. That's right, the players! Nothing is confidential. If the players want to know something, the referee can hand them the book and say, "Look it up." Fiendish referees should time them and charge their characters the appropriate fee for the time they spend with the book in their hands.

WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

Warning: Cover your copy of *Night City* in clear contact paper, or tear it apart and three-ring bind it. This book is going to get as much use as a certain fantasy game's players' handbook—but it's not as sturdily made. Protect it or watch it fall apart eventually. It's well made for a perfect-bound product, but even a good hard-bound book is in trouble with this much use.

I praised the detail in *Night City*. Sadistic referees are going to penalize their player characters lots of eurobucks because there's so

much information to absorb, it's hard to find the exact bits you need for game play. You can get lost in the detail. Some more mundane, game-type detail would have been appreciated. Several nifty pieces of hardware are mentioned in passing, including the fantastic idea of gun cameras ("Honest, it was self-defence! See, there he is going for his gun as my slugs blow him in half."). But there are no stats for any new devices or cyberwares.

And finally, a bit of chiding for the authors. I guess they're all Californians (or at least West Coasters), because they sort of ignore the Midwest. Why, we barely even have plagues here! I looked for any disaster markers on Missouri and found nothing. I'd have thought we'd rate at least an earthquake marker—after all, the New Madrid Fault is going to make the San Andreas' greatest quake look like a mere quiver when it goes. A little more research, folks. There are parts of the country that exist between the coasts, Chicago and Dallas.

MY FAVORITE BITS

The KMIL Militech Home Shopping Channel ("Tonight only, a special deal on grenade launchers!"). The Julliard, a gang of militant street performers and mimes. The Bozos, a group of totally unhinged weirdos who have themselves biosculpted to look like clowns! The information on the social order. The great and complete maps and graphics. The full-color map.

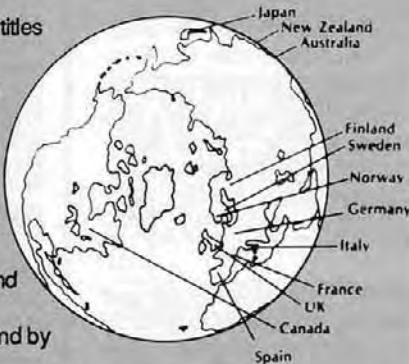
SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Like I said, buy this puppy. Right now. Two thumbs up; I'd make it three, but I only have two. Extra kudos to R. Talsorian Games for producing a nice, thick sourcebook at a decent price. Ω

GDW Product Distribution

GDW products (including *Traveller*) are available through distributors as follows:

- **Australia:** Imported and distributed by *Jedko Games*, 134 Cochranes Rd., Moorabbin, Vic, 3198, Australia.
- **Denmark:** *Fafner Spiele*, Ermelundsvej 92D, DK-2820 Gentofte, Denmark.
- **Finland:** Imported and distributed by *Fantasiapeli Tudeer KY*, P Rastitie 6 B 22, 01360 Vantaa, Finland. Some titles are translated into Finnish.
- **Italy:** Imported and distributed by *Books and Games Via Paisiello No. 4*, 20131 Milano, Italy. Some titles are translated into Italian.
- **Japan:** Printed and distributed by *Post Hobby Japan Co., Ltd.*, 26-5, 5-chome, Sendagaya, Shibuyaku, Tokyo, Japan. Titles published are translated into Japanese.
- **The Netherlands:** *999 Games*, Rondeel 134, 1082 MH Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- **New Zealand:** Imported and distributed by *Blackwood Gayle*, PO Box 28358, Auckland, New Zealand.
- **Norway:** *Grendel Distribution AS*, P.O. Box 6729 St. Olavs Plass, 0130 Oslo 1, Norway.
- **Portugal:** *York Beleza Frente*, Arte E Roda, LDA AV ANT, Augusto De Aquiar 13-C, 1000 Lisboa, Portugal.
- **Spain:** Imported and distributed by *Central De Jocs*, C/Numancia 112-116 Bajos, Barcelona 08029 and *Jocs & Games*, c/ Muntaner, 193, Barcelona 08036 Spain. Some titles are translated into Spanish.
- **Sweden:** Imported and distributed by *Hobbyhuset*, Box 2003, S-750 02, Uppsala, Sweden; and by *Target Games*, Frihamnen S-100 56, Stockholm, Sweden.
- **United Kingdom:** Imported and distributed by *Chris Harvey Games*, PO Box 38, Bath Street, Walsall, WS1 3BY, UK; *Hobby Games Ltd.*, Unit T3, Rudford Industrial Estate, Ford Airfield, NR Arundel, West Sussex, BN18 0BD, UK.
- **Germany:** Imported and distributed by *Fantasy Productions*, Konkordiastr. 61, Postfach: 3026, 4000 Dusseldorf 1, Germany and *Welt der Spiele GmbH*, Alt Griesheim 72, 6230 Frankfurt, A.M. 80, Germany. Some titles are translated into German. Ω



CHALLENGE Classifieds

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Challenge will not be held liable for errors occurring in advertisements. If you find an error in your ad, please send a corrected version to Challenge.

Classified ads are free, and run for at least one issue, longer as space permits. Any reasonable length is accepted, but all ads are subject to editing. Please type ads.

Display Ads

Write to receive our rate card.

PLAYERS WANTED

BATTLETECH player looking for worthy opponents in the San Francisco Peninsula area. Interested parties please write to J. M. Hiatt, 832 N. Humboldt St. #1, San Mateo, CA 94401-1439. (58)

ATTENTION RENEGADE LEGIONNAIRES! Playtesters needed for scenarios in any or all *Renegade Legion* game systems. This is real playtesting! I will send scenarios and a questionnaire to fill out and send back. Criticism and suggestions are welcome. If your group is running out of scenarios to play, this is perfect for you. For more information, contact Christopher King, Box MWC-1847, 1701 College Ave., Fredericksburg, VA 22401-4666. (56)

VAMPIRE HUNTERS, this is the PBM for you! I am starting a *Rifts Vampires* PBM. Contact me for information and special custom character sheet. Matthew Johnson, 625 W. Malvern Ave., Fullerton, CA 92632. (56)

STATE COORDINATORS and local representatives wanted for the Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games. Send a SASE to CAR-PGa International HQ, Attn: W. A. Flatt, Chair, 8032 Locust Ave., Miller, IN 46403. (56)

HISTORY OF THE IMPERIUM WORKING GROUP (HIWG) is a *Traveller* club spanning from Australia to Finland, active in *Traveller* development. Members receive the bimonthly *Tiffany Star* newsletter. Write to Ed Edwards, 1410 E. Boyd, Norman, OK 73071. (54)

WRITER would like to contact players and designers for history of the hobby. Older players, second-generation gamers and women are of particular interest. Write to J. Cambias, 18 Georgetown Ct., Durham, NC 27705. (54)

SHADOWRUN PLAYERS wanted in Tempe/Scottsdale, AZ area. Please contact Peter Wimmer at 2646 Champlain Ave., Tempe, AZ 85281. (54)

COMBINED ARMS/COMMAND DECISION group looking for University of Florida, SFCC and any others interested in an extended miniatures campaign. Contact Harold Medicus, PO Box 936, Micanopy, FL 32667. (54)

BATTLETECH 'Mech Warrior': Reports of our death have been greatly exaggerated! Samos' Swordsmen, formerly the Federated-Commonwealth 472nd RCT, is seeking any new sibko which is ready for a Trial of Position. Those who survive the training course will be invited to participate in our Cerberus Campaign in the Outworlds Alliance. Are you Star Commander material? Seyla! Anyone interested in a long-running, experienced roleplaying campaign should contact Swordsmen Recruiting Command, c/o Khan Gunther Bellows, Route 2, Box 157, Micanopy, FL 32667. (54)

I AM STARTING A Rifts PBM. For information and special custom character sheet, contact Matthew Johnson, 625 W. Malvern Ave., Fullerton, CA 92632. (54)

STATE COORDINATORS and local representatives wanted for the Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games. Please send SASE to CAR-PGa International HQ, Attn: W. A. Flatt, Chair, 8032 Locust

Ave., Miller, IN 46403. (54)

NEW TO THE AREA. Desire to play or referee any GDW or *Shadowrun* campaign. Also play wargames. Contact D. Coleman Rape Jr., 611 Coleman St., Stephenville, TX 76401. (53)

OLD TRAVELLER PLAYERS in the New Brunswick, NJ area. If you are interested, write to Marc Grossman, 21 Manor Ct., Building 2, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. (53)

JOIN THE National Association for the Advancement of Role-Playing (NAARP), the world's first independent, nonprofit gamer network! Receive an annual membership directory, start or join an official NAARP club, participate in and organize official NAARP tournaments for charity. Get news about events affecting the hobby worldwide and in your neighborhood, and learn how to teach your nongaming friends to learn the intricacies of advanced gaming systems. Write to NAARP, PO Box 2752, Chapel Hill, NC 27515. (52)

HIWG (Australia and New Zealand) is looking for *MegaTraveller* players and referees down under who are interested in discussing the future of the Imperium and contributing to its development. For information write to David Schneider, 5 East Ave., Allenby Gardens, South Australia 5009. (52)

FOR SALE

ITEMS FOR TRAVELLER, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Twilight: 2000*, *2300 AD*. Also a number of non-RPGs. All in good condition and at cheap prices. All must go before my wife burns them. Send SASE to Fred Kiesche, 123 Rachel Court, Franklin Park, NJ 08823. (57)

TRAVELLER collection, books, supplements, adventures, etc. Also, *Azhanti High Lightning*. For list, send SASE to Paul Sanders, 612 S. Patton Ct., Denver, CO 80219. (53)

MEGATRAVELLER material on disk. This IBM-format material currently is about 10 megabytes in size (about half is pkzipped). It ranges from library data to vehicle designs to sector maps to articles to software/spreadsheets. Send SASE for list to Bryan Borich, 3890 50th St., San Diego, CA 92105-3005. (53)

OUT-OF-PRINT TRAVELLER items. Also old copies of *Dragon*, *ADQ*, *White Dwarf*, etc., plus old games and modules. For list, contact Mark Minch, 110 Edwin Ave. SE, Massillon, OH 44646. (52)

SOURCEBOOKS and supplements for *Twilight: 2000*. Also *Challenge* magazines (issues 25 to present). For use with *MegaTraveller/Traveller*. *Dragon* magazine issue 59 (March '82)—features subclass of scout profession, "Skitterbugging and the Exonidas Spaceport," over 21 pages of information. Write to Darren Skomoroh, 44 Walden Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2C 0N4, CANADA. No SASE necessary. (52)

TRADE

GDW'S Rebellion Sourcebook (*MegaTraveller*) or ICE's *Space-master* modules or sourcebooks. I will trade for *Twilight: 2000* material (first and second editions) or TSR's *Top Secret* game material. Contact Kurt Searfoss, 708c NE Ball Drive, Lees Summit, MO 64063. (57)

KALISZ TOWN-GUIDE with map (original in Polish). I will trade for a fair copy of *Black Madonna*. Arne Rassek, Berliner Str. 23, 3005 Hemmingen 1, Germany. (56)

MEGATRAVELLER Gamers' Exchange—Share starships, vehicles, maps, worlds and adventure scenarios with other *MegaTraveller* gamers. Over 60 megabytes of information. Send SASE (use IRC for non-Canadian addresses) to Rob Prior, 262 Dunforest, Willowdale, Ontario, M2N 4J9 CANADA. (53)

DRAGON 13 for one unopened pack of AD & D trading cards. Or I can make a better offer for more packs. Contact Eddie Burns, 510 Buckingham Ct., Hopewell, VA 23860. (53)

WANTED

CLASSIC TRAVELLER material wanted. *Vanguard Reaches*, *The Beyond* and *SORAG* by Paranoia Press, and *Glimmerdrift Reaches* and *Ley Sector* by Judges Guild. Would also like any issues of the *Journal of the Travellers Aid Society*. Prefer originals but good photocopies okay. Please send list, prices and condition of items to David Feltmeyer, 7535 Dale Ave., St. Louis, MO 63117. (58)

CHALLENGE 32, 35 AND 38 (*Star Wars* material). Will pay decent price for either photocopy or original. Write to Kurt Searfoss, 708c NE Ball Drive, Lees Summit, MO 64063. (57)

ISSUES 1 AND 4 of the *Journal of the Travellers Aid Society*, and issue 1 of *High Passage* wanted, either originals or photocopies. Send details to Mark Clark, 598 Thompson Station Road, Newark, DE 19711-7520. (56/53)

COPY OF THE *Near Star List* (all pages) from **2300 AD** wanted. Also *Atlas of the Imperium* and *MegaTraveller Journal 1*. I will pay reasonable price or trade MTJ 2, MT *World Builders' Handbook* or copies of articles from JTAS (5-24) or *Challenge* (25+). Contact David Johnson, 11150 Beamer Road #291, Houston, TX 7789. (56)

CYBERPUNK, *BattleTech* or *Shadowrun* sets for individuals who are incarcerated. Funds are extremely low, so payment may not be possible. If you are willing to donate any of the above starting sets, please send them to Benjamin Donovan, #882123, Indiana State Farm, 1500 West US 40, Greencastle, IN 46135-9275. (56)

PARTICIPANTS for a *Shadowrun*, *Cyberpunk*, etc. APazine. Please write for information to Niko Wieleba, PO Box 10097, Glendale, CA 91209-0097. (56/51)

LOOKING FOR THE GAME (or supplement) which features Larry Niven's *Ringworld*. I can remember seeing the cover in 1985. If you know where I can find it—or,

better yet, have a copy—please contact me. Benjamin J. Rogers, 902 Fulton Ave., Hannibal, MO 63401. (54)

VIDEOTAPES of British TV series *Star Cops* wanted. VHS or Beta formats acceptable. Contact Rob Prior, 262 Dunforest, Willowdale, Ontario, CANADA M2N 4J9. (53)

PHOTOCOPIES in good condition of various articles in *Challenge* 27-31, 33, 34, 40-44. Write for list to OB Vollant APA, 266 577 840, GD "A" Block, FO Halifax, Halifax, Nova Scotia, CANADA B3K 2X0. (53)

PHOTOCOPY of an early *White Dwarf* article giving statistics for the Blood Guard of Stephen Donaldson's *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* series. I will pay a reasonable price or exchange articles. Please respond to Rick Taylor, 916 S. Booker, Little Rock, AR 72204. (53)

ATLAS OF THE IMPERIUM and 76 Patrons. If you can help, write to Marc Grossman, 21 Manor Ct., Building 2, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. (53)

ALL TWILIGHT: 2000 articles from the following issues of *Challenge*: 25, 26, 27, 30, 31 and 36. Am willing to pay all copy and postage costs. Please contact Donald K. Doll, 830 S. Wenonah Ave., Oak Park, IL 60304-1036. (52)

ORIGINALS/PHOTOCOPIES of *Stardate* or *Stardrive* magazine. Price negotiable. I also need FASA's *Triangle* supplement. Please contact Cary Layton, PO Box 416, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701. (52)

IDEAS for computer programs to aid in playing and refereeing *MegaTraveller* game system. Programs will be PC compatible. Other game systems will be considered. Also want any available PC-compatible *MegaTraveller* programs (buy or trade). Programs will eventually be for sale, but the person who had the inspiration will receive a free copy of the completed program and credit in the documentation. Write to Russell Wetherington, 2611 Forbes St., Jacksonville, FL 32204. (52)

ANY ROBOTECH RPGs, preferably book one, *Macross*, but any will do. Contact Matt Schafer, 1796 Barker St. NE, Palm Bay, FL 32907. (52)

SECURITY LEAK magazine, Third Imperium. Originals or photocopies. Richard Artis, 151 G Meadow Place, Hope, IN 47246. (52)

ORIGINAL TRAVELLER material wanted. Need rule books (#4 and up), supplements (#12+), Adventures (#9+), *Challenge* (#26, 29-35, 37-47), Traveller's Digest (any), *Grand Survey* (or *Robots*, *Action Aboard*, *Rescue on Galatea*, *Fate of the Sky Raiders*, *The Harreusa Project*). Photocopies okay. Send list, prices, conditions to Ken Bartold, 26939 Sheahan, Dearborn Heights, MI 48127. (52)

FANZINES

INQUISITOR—Warhammer 40K newsletter/forum for experienced players. EQ/vehicle design, open forum, scenarios, Q & A, army calc. worksheets, unit stat cards and more! *Inquisitor*, PO Box 14485, Santa Rosa, CA 95402-6485. (58)

GALACTICANARCHY is a PBMN game of exploration and conquest set after a protracted civil war. Two to 30 players vie for control of the universe, with up to 70 artifacts, 700 systems and 1000 fleets in one game. Write to Anarchy By Mail, PO Box 873, Allen, TX 75002. (57)

TRANSACTIONS of the Royal Martian Geographical Society is a quarterly publication devoted to roleplaying in the Victorian age, with a primary emphasis on the game *Space: 1889*. Each 20-page issue features several adventures, detailed descriptions of NPCs and equipment, and background articles on late-19th-century history and culture. If interested, send a SASE to TRMGS, c/o Mark Clark, 598 Thompson Station Road, Newark, DE 19711-7520. (56/53)

MELBOURNE TIMES: Newsletter providing background material for the *Earth Colonies* campaign. Features include news service, world briefs, character sketches, corporate portfolios, political analysis, cultural events and more. Subscribers and contributors send SASE to *Melbourne Times*, c/o David Johnson, 11150 Beamer Road #291, Houston, TX 77089. Overseas include three IRCs. (56)

SS&V (*Starships, Starports & Vehicles*) is a fanzine that covers the areas listed for *MegaTraveller*. It includes one article, with the rest

devoted to designs. AR (*Alien Realms*) is a quarterly fanzine covering aliens in *MegaTraveller*. Currently, two issues are available. Write to Bryan Borich, 3890 50th St., San Diego, CA 92105-3005. (53)

I WISH TO ESTABLISH a fanzine dedicated to *Warhammer* fantasy roleplaying enthusiasts. Interested parties should reply to Rick Taylor, c/o Der Chroniken Kaiserlich, 916 S. Booker, Little Rock, AR 72204. (53)

ABA PROCEEDINGS. Exclusively *MegaTraveller* fanzine covering Vland Domain and all areas coreward and spinward. Each issue includes 1+ starship of TL14—(no TL15). Issues 12 and 13 were 10 and 12 pages. For more information, contact Clayton R. Bush, PO Box 119, Limon, CO 80828. Send letter-sized SASE for list of available HIWG documents. Starship spreadsheets available in WK1 (IBM) format on 5.25" disks. (52)

INQUISITOR. Warhammer 40K newsletter/forum for experienced players. EQ/vehicle design, open forum, scenarios, question and answer, army calculation worksheets, unit stat cards and more. For additional information, write to *Inquisitor*, PO Box 14485, Santa Rosa, CA 95402-6485. (52)

SPINWARD TIMES—a new fanzine dealing with the merchant and economics in *MegaTraveller*. Also included are adventures, medical data, news and equipment. For more information, write to *Spinward Times*, c/o AG Games, 823 Ponsard St., Brossard, Quebec, CANADA J4W 1W1. (51)

SIGNAL-GK—New, exclusive *MegaTraveller* fanzine. Adventure in Dagudasuaag sector! Each issue will detail a subsector, a particular race and planets. At least two adventures in each issue. *Signal-GK*—A call for help; a call to adventure. Recognized by HIWG. For additional information, write to Jay Campbell, The Sanctuary, 45 Fairfield, Hebden Bridge, West Yorks, UK 4X7 6JD. (51)

JUMPSPACE—A new fanzine exclusively for *MegaTraveller*. Includes adventures, equipment, news, players' tips, fiction, and much more. For additional details, write to *Jumpspace*, c/o AG Games, 823 Ponsard St., Brossard, Quebec, CANADA J4W 1W1. (51)

Challenge 58

Rate each article from 0 to 5. 0 means you did not read the article. 1 indicates great dissatisfaction, and 5 indicates great satisfaction. 2, 3 and 4 are shades in between.

To use a separate sheet, list each article number, then your rating.

Send responses to:

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Send us your feedback, and you will automatically be entered in our drawing for a FREE one-year subscription to **Challenge** magazine.

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Feedback results for **Challenge 55** will appear next month.

Next Issue

Don't miss **Challenge 59**, our Special Mysteries/April Fools Issue, available in April.

TWILIGHT: 2000

"Surprise Party" by George William Herbert: Rescue a kidnapped businessman from a remote island in the Bahamas. And "A Question of Identity" introduces the new Equipment Identification skill.

MEGATRAVELLER

Trasilon Corporation stumbles across something big in "Coreward Conspiracy" by James Maliszewski. Plus three Rebellion-era Amber Zones by Greg Videll.

DARK CONSPIRACY

A surprise beginning to a supposedly routine day in "I Hate Mondays" by Adam Geibel.

SPACE: 1889

"Escape from Dioscuria" by James L. Cambias.

2300 AD

Some of the major labels have been threatening independent bands in "Rock 'n' Roll Never Dies" by Michael C. LaBossiere.

AND MORE!

Plus *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*, *Shadowrun*, *GURPS Cyberpunk*, *Star Trek*, *Ghostbusters International*, *Tales from the Floating Vagabond* and much more!

Challenge Schedule

Challenge is making plans for some exciting special issues. And the best part is—we're still looking for writers for these and our regular issues. So you writers out there warm up your keyboards and get your minds in gear. But before you start, be sure to send in a SASE and a request for the **Challenge** submission guidelines.

Challenge 59: Mysteries/April Fools Issue: These adventures will really keep you guessing.

Challenge 60: Swimsuit Insert: You loved it in issue 49, and now it's better than ever.

Challenge 61: Heavy Metal Issue: This new equipment is guaranteed to blow you away.

Challenge 63: MegaTraveller Insert: You've been begging for it—now here it is! Need we say more?

Challenge 64: Bestiary Issue: These new critters will burrow, sneak, slither, creep, slink, steal, wiggle, wriggle and writhe their way into the heart of any campaign.

Challenge 66: Horror Issue: If this third annual Horror Issue doesn't give you nightmares, then you must not be paying attention.

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MegaTraveller 2:™ Quest For The Ancients is science-fiction role-playing. An infinite universe, filled with fantastic possibilities, awaits exploration. With over 100 distinctive worlds to visit, awesome adventures, perplexing mysteries and bizarre aliens, **MegaTraveller 2** makes you the hero — or villain — of an interstellar epic only your wildest imagination could conceive.

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For IBM-PC/Tandy/compatibles. For the latest information on release dates and availabilities, call Paragon Customer Service at 412-838-1173, 9 am to 5 pm EST, weekdays. © 1991 Paragon Software and Game Designers Workshop. MegaTraveller 2: Quest for the Ancients is produced under license from Game Designers Workshop.

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